SINNERS IN HEAVEN

CLIVE ARDEN

PROPERTY OF

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SINNERS IN HEAVEN

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BY

CLIVE ARDEN

AUTHOR OF
ENTICEMENT

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES
FROM THE PHOTOPLAY
A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

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"From harmony, from heavenly harmony
This universal frame began;
When Nature underneath a heap
Of jarring atoms lay,
And could not heave her head,
The tuneful voice was heard from high,
Arise, ye more than dead.
Then cold and hot and moist and dry
In order to their stations leap,
And Music's power obey.
From harmony, from heavenly harmony
This universal frame began:
From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in Man."

DRYDEN.

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PART ONE

LITTLE NOTES

I

Darbury was a small parish possessing an old church, a combined post-office and sweet-shop, but no actual village street. Hillbeak, resembling a garden city, two miles away, supplied all other requisites, from sausages to imitation-silk stockings. Darbury straggled about among its Surrey pinewoods, over heather-covered commons, beside its large lake, with an occasional modern motor-bus thundering along the main road to remind it of other, more turbulent, centers of life outside its sphere.

As often happens with isolated people and places, the little parish was very self-important. Like modern womanhood, it was in a state of transition. Much of the old stuffiness had worn away, but also much of the old kindliness. The war and motor traffic had tended to modernize the community; and the new freedom rather went to its head. It was as yet not quite sure of its line, though painfully anxious to appear assured —one half shocked at the other half's doings, and altogether rather mixed.

This had been apparent, a year ago, when divorce had

raised its ominous head for the first time within the memory of living inhabitants. Divorces took place elsewhere of course, and Darburyites read and discussed the newspaper accounts with avidity; but that such things should happen within their own fold, between people known and even liked by everybody else, was an unheard-of idea. The topic, thrilling in the Press, appeared indecent in these circumstances. Although it was Major Randall who had obtained the decree; and although his wife, instead of offering a defense, had brazenly gone off with another man; yet most people shrank from his society. As Mrs. Stockley, the widow of the late vicar, sagely remarked: "There are often two sides to these things; you never know." When a rich family named French appeared from obscurity ("trade," it was rumored: "either nails or carburetors"), and Major Randall turned his lonely footsteps toward their mansion pretty often and claimed a former friendship with the daughter—Well! Darbury agreed that "You never *do* know." . . .

Even the Squire and Mrs. Rochdale, kindliest of the "old order," began to show a slight coldness. They placed the hospitable doors of Darbury House ajar, so to speak, instead of wide open, hinting to their only son that a little less golf with the major might be wise. But Hugh laughed at the hint, in his easy-going way. "That's all his funeral, not mine"; thus he waived responsibility for the morals of the house of Randall. "His handicap is plus 2—only plus man we've got in the club. . . ." These things being what really mattered, condoned cartloads of sin in his eyes.

A wholesome young Briton, Hugh would abominate shady actions, if brought actually into contact with them;

but he lacked the imagination to visualize what failed to interest him. Questions of morality, complexities of the heart, were quite beyond his ken. His own purpose was single, his own heart fixed. Barbara Stockley, only child of the late vicar, had filled it entirely, since the days of frocks and perambulators. Growing up together, inseparable, their engagement was a foregone conclusion. Nobody therefore had been surprised at its public announcement upon Hugh's return from the war.

The wedding had been fixed for the following December. Darbury turned with a feeling of wholesome romance from the Randall thrills to those of frocks and local festivities. The happy pair were to live in one of the pretty modern houses at Hillbeak during the old squire's lifetime, continuing all their activities in Darbury as usual. Everybody would call upon them; and everything would be very nice, respectable and conventional. Marriage would doubtless cause Barbara to shed that air of reserve, or aloof abstraction, which baffled many people.

"A little difficult to understand," was the usual verdict. "Not much in her, probably," they added; for what Darbury did not understand could not be worth understanding.

But while everybody purred contentedly over this satisfactory romance, a bomb-shell exploded in their midst, launched by the heroine herself. Instead of spending the next four months amid dainty needlework, her mind oblivious to all save the prospective bridegroom and the dressmaker, she shattered all traditions by announcing her intention to accompany an aunt, Mrs. Stockley's half-sister, to Australia. Darbury gasped.

But it gasped yet more upon discovering that the journey was to be made, in ultra-modern style, by aeroplane. An ordinary ship would have seemed at least respectable. As it was, she not only intended leaving her future husband on the brink of matrimony, but a strange man would be in charge of the desperate adventure. . . .

The ostensible reason given was merely a visit to the aunt's colonial relatives. But of course everybody knew better than to believe that; a deeper motive was needed to inspire such a risky wild-goose chase. Could there be private trouble between the engaged couple? Miss Brown diffidently put forth this theory. Miss Brown wrote poetry, therefore always searched for "soul" in everything, especially in romance. But the girl herself went about as usual, only a suppressed excitement deepening the already deep blue of her eyes, bubbling out occasionally into scraps of confidential speech which yet were no confidences at all.

"Such an adventure!" she exclaimed, when Miss Brown sought to probe to the soul of this problem. "The only one I have ever had. There will never be such another chance."

This from one who should have been deep in the adventure of marriage! The poet was rather shocked. Hugh, she learned, had been averse to the idea at first. Quite right and proper! He had also steadfastly refused to go too; and Darbury had agreed with the decision. That a man should give up the routine of autumn pursuits was unheard of. . . . Besides, he managed his father's extensive property, and the harvest would soon be in full swing. Darbury, like Hugh, was essentially practical.

Great difficulty, it transpired over the tea-cups, had been experienced in overcoming Mrs. Stockley's

objections. But as she, like many weak women, usually took refuge in tears when thwarted, little direct information was obtained.

However, Darbury persevered in its ferreting tactics, at last gaining a little more light. Mrs. Field paid one of her brief visits to her pretty house tucked away on the common; and it became known that she had arranged everything. Everybody said "Oh-h!" in a drawn-out syllable which expressed volumes; for Mrs. Field was accustomed to doing extraordinary things, without bowing to convention. The aviator proved to be her cousin, a man well known in aviation and in the engineering circles of many lands. Now everybody became consumed with a new curiosity. They opened neglected newspapers, hastily scanning the glowing accounts of his exploits. After having swooped down upon England from Australia in a super-machine of his own design—brilliantly achieving the long test trip with two passengers in addition to his crew—an influential firm had cabled agreement of purchase, pending an immediate, equally successful, return journey. So much they gleaned. But why or how Mrs. Field had maneuvered for Barbara Stockley and her aunt, Miss Dolly Davies, to be his passengers on the return journey, Darbury was left to conjecture, Mrs. Field being a woman who kept her own counsel.

A rumor soon arose that the aviator might be expected at the "House on the Moor" for the week-end. This, clashing with a country fête at which most of the Darburyites were assisting, raised them to a state of unusual excitement. At any time a party in the country, with its opportunity for exchanging news and rumors of news, must never be missed; but this one held additional attractions: *He* might be there. . . .

The vicar and his sister were obliged to push their bicycles most of the way, the track being narrow and sandy across the common; but they never moved without these aids to progress. They were very much alike: both tall and thin, both wearing pince-nez with strong lenses, and both exuding zeal from every pore. You knew the profession of the Reverend John Horne the moment he opened his thin lips, without reference to his very round white collar or black square-toed boots. His energy was boundless; but, as with his tennis, seemed to result oftener in hitting his ball into the net than over it.

If people differed from his views they did so through their own ignorance, which was thereby exposed. But he pitied them and prayed for them; thus proving satisfactorily—to himself—his broad-mindedness. Incidentally, the congregation at the local Wesleyan Chapel increased.

To understand Darbury, as with India, one must understand Caste. There is first The County: uttered with awed relish. This comprises the aristocracy within reach, extending to certain old families of landowners, the country squires of generations.

Next, clinging with slippery fingers, come the Hangers-on of the County. Distant relatives, the Services, and certain clergymen, have, perhaps, the surest grip.

After this are found those who fraternize with the strap-hangers, sunning themselves in reflected glory, while taking private care to educate themselves up to such heights. It means calling the substantial midday meal "luncheon," the evening chop "dinner," the modest kitchen "the servants' hall"; with much study of books on etiquette.

Now and then a small wind blows across these rustic

retreats, encouraging sparks of intellectual life, or fanning them into a blaze.

This had taken place in Darbury upon the advent of the Hornes. They brought an atmosphere of culture with them, being much addicted to quotations. Darbury bestirred itself to an appearance of equal culture, and also began to quote. Every topic mentioned was privately read up, in order to keep pace with Miss Horne's intellect.

On the Friday afternoon before the fête she walked rapidly across the common, more purpose even than usual noticeable in her manner. In addition to a fund of knowledge concerning aviation, she had a terrific piece of news with which to electrify everybody. Only once did she trouble to address her brother; but the remark, apparently trivial, gave the key to the workings of her mind.

"I hope Mary Davies is there." . . .

Miss Mary Davies was Mrs. Stockley's elder sister, now entrenched in Darbury upon one of her periodical lengthy visits. Having no encumbrances such as husband, children, dogs or cats, she spent her days swallow-fashion, migrating with the seasons to select "Pensions" at pleasant health resorts. Her work, to which she often vaguely alluded, consisted of some cold, but eminently systematic, organization concerning what she termed "fallen girls." Upon this topic she was instinctively approached as an authority. Not that she had ever fallen, or even been requested to fall. All the same, she viewed man with disfavor mixed with suspicion. Otherwise bosom friends, she and Miss Horne were intellectual rivals. To be first with any knowledge, therefore, was a ceaseless ambition, keeping both strung up to high endeavor.

Mr. Horne made no reply to this observation. He walked along lost in gloomy thought, with what Barbara called the "pained priest look." Only when the "House on the Moor," set amid a wilderness of gorse, heather and pinewoods, was reached did he break into speech.

"We must not expect Mrs. Field to look upon it as we do. Her views are—well—strange. Of course," he added charitably, "she means well. Such a charming woman; *but*——" Closing his lips ominously, he heaved a profound sigh, as he opened the gate.

II

Mrs. Stockley belonged to the order of women who resemble silkworms, in being wrapped entirely round by the cocoon of their own atmospheres. Hers consisted of Family and the Church; that being the correct order of precedence, should one be necessary. Widow of a late vicar and daughter of a late archdeacon, who was the son of a late bishop, she seemed indeed the visible embodiment of the Church and the lay world.

She had arrived with her sisters at the "House on the Moor" very hot, her small, ferrety face more peevish-looking than usual. Mrs. Field, a little flushed from a hard set of tennis, hurried up to the veranda to greet them, the sunlight glinting upon the dark waves of her hair and merging into the general radiance which enlivened her pleasant face and graceful figure. But Mrs. Stockley was too absorbed in grievances, as a mole in its burrowing, ever to notice the sunshine.

"We intended to drive," she complained, "but Barbara disappeared without ordering the pony. Really, she has become more thoughtless every day since you put this wild Australian idea into her head."

Mrs. Field produced chairs and cushions, wisely forbearing to suggest that, being adequately provided with tongues, one of the three might have given the order.

Mrs. Stockley sank into a chair and produced the Church embroidery without which she seldom moved.

"Things do fit in badly sometimes; don't they?" Mrs. Field remarked tactfully.

"They do!" sighed Mrs. Stockley. "But it is always because people consider nobody but themselves. If Barbara would think of me instead of—where is she, by the way?"

"Playing tennis."

"And showing a lot of leg!" broke in Miss Mary Davies. "You must speak to her about it, Alice."

Mrs. Stockley heaved a deep sigh. "It would be useless. Present-day children are like present-day servants, most disappointing."

Miss Davies stood for a moment watching the distant players through her unnecessary lorgnette.

"Modern tennis is extremely unbecoming," she observed at last, sitting down by Mrs. Stockley; but this lady was casting covert glances at her younger sister, engaged in animated conversation with Mrs. Field.

"Dolly!" she called. "Dolly! I hope you are considering my advice and giving up this ridiculous expedition?"

Miss Dolly Davies taught music in a girls' school in London. Although she had inevitably acquired many characteristics of those who live chiefly among their own sex, she possessed a zest for adventure lacking in her sisters.

"No," she declared decisively, her plump face beaming; "we are discussing luggage. I shall take my old tin box with provisions, and a spirit lamp."

"What on earth for?" inquired Miss Davies, contemptuously.

"In case of accidents, of course."

The word aroused Mrs. Stockley's uneasiness again. "I wish, if you must go, you would go alone."

"With a strange man? Oh, Alice! Surely you and Mary would not countenance that?"

A little explosion of laughter came from Mrs. Field. "Alan alone with a woman would be priceless!" she exclaimed. "My cousin," she went on, in answer to three pairs of puzzled eyes, "was left an orphan. A bachelor uncle, who spent most of his life in travel, brought him up. Alan is more used to barbarians than to women." She broke off to greet a fresh arrival.

"He doesn't sound very safe," said Miss Davies.

"Still, he is Mrs. Field's cousin, therefore of quite good family," Mrs. Stockley replied hastily, as if to reassure herself. "And he has won quite a number of decorations in the war. So I hope everything will be all right."

"There is always a certain amount of risk with strange men away from their homes," Miss Davies observed, darkly. "Here is Mrs. Brent-Hewson! Really, she seems bigger and fatter each time I see her. And how obviously new her teeth are!"

Mrs. Brent-Hewson certainly was massive: a severe-faced woman whom nobody could accuse of a sense of humor. Life to her was a heavy affair. She might be described as embodying the agricultural side of Darbury's social system; for she bred pigs; having no children to rear. This she called, in her pedantic way, "national service"; and it was, incidentally, a profitable hobby. Another national service consisted in frequent disappear-

ances upon lecturing tours. She possessed a husband—her second, be it noted, but he was quite an afterthought: a mild, bald, little man with indifferent health. Before marriage he was known as Jimmy Hewson; the "Brent-" was added afterward. Nobody knew why they married, the bridegroom perhaps least of all. He sat, sometimes, by his solitary fire, and pondered over the life and death of his predecessor. It seemed to him that they might have been good friends.

Mrs. Brent-Hewson shook hands unsmilingly with Mrs. Field.

"What about your cow?" she demanded, with the cold dispassionate glare which quelled any thought of frivolity. "Has she come in yet?"

"No," replied Mrs. Field, who fortunately understood colloquial agricultural terms.

"H'm. That's strange. You must have counted wrong. Thought she was due to calve last week?"

"She was," admitted her owner, rather guiltily; "at least, we thought so."

"'Thought so?' It's no good keeping animals if you don't understand them. I had better look at her myself after tea."

Mrs. Stockley privately considered this product of the "new order" slightly vulgar. But as Mrs. Brent-Hewson was related to a County Family such trials had to be endured.

Miss Davies and the breeder of pigs, though both looked upon as women of the world, were not much enamored of each other. Their greeting was coldly polite. Neither cared much for their hostess, whom neither could understand, and conversation languished.

One who said little but was always pleasant, never

thrusting forward her own individuality, was beyond the comprehension of Darburyites. And Mrs. Field knew that here, in her own particular corner, lay a gulf that could never be bridged. Her son was in the Army; and a flat in town, with an ever-widening sphere of philanthropic activities, kept her much away; but now and then she made a meteoric flight across the dazed vision of Darbury society.

For a few moments she stood watching the tennis, shading her eyes with her hand. A poetic admirer once remarked that if you looked into their fathomless gray depth in repose you heard the soft falling of all the tears in the world. She shrieked with laughter upon this being repeated to her; nevertheless it contained a certain truth; for she possessed that rare gift of magnetic sympathy as impossible to locate as the center of a rainbow. The sudden click of the garden gate broke the momentary silence which had fallen after Mrs. Brent-Hewson's heavy arrival.

The vicar and his sister were seen waving vigorously, in the Christian-like cheerfulness of spirit upon which they prided themselves. They had scarcely greeted their hostess before Miss Horne's stored-up patience gave out.

"Have you heard?" she asked, in the clear metallic voice peculiar to a certain type of woman called well-bred.

"Heard what?" Miss Davies cried, her ears springing to attention.

"Major Randall is going to marry Miss French!"

The blaze of virtuous indignation in Miss Horne's face was reflected in that of her friend and rival. Miss Davies gave an inarticulate smack of the lips as if incapable of speech. Her whole body bristled.

"Going through the form of marriage, you mean!"

struck in the vicar, with much bitterness; while Mrs. Stockley clasped her altar-cloth, as if clinging to an anchor in a wicked sea.

Miss Davies' breath returned. "It's scandalous!"

"Should think it's a case for the King's Proctor," Mrs. Brent-Hewson remarked scornfully in her brief decided manner.

"I always thought there was *something* behind his attentions to—those people," Miss Davies observed mysteriously.

"Oh," broke in Mrs. Field, "he knew them long ago. They were always warm friends, even before his marriage."

"This modern friendship between men and women never answers," Mrs. Stockley commented plaintively.

"No?" inquired her hostess politely.

"It's modern fiddlesticks!" Miss Davies broke in, hotly. "Sooner or later physical attraction comes in; and then there is trouble."

"Don't you think it is always there?" suggested Mrs. Field. "Isn't it that which gives the piquancy to such friendships, whatever basis they are founded upon?"

Miss Davies surveyed her through raised lorgnette.

"If that is so," she replied, entirely misunderstanding her meaning, "it reflects most discreditably upon modern society! But I fear you are right. No man or woman thrown perpetually together could escape the sexual attraction. Therefore I maintain that such intimacies under the guise of friendship are dangerous. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Horne?"

"Yes, indeed," he replied, nodding repeatedly, as if in deep thought. "'"'Tis true, 'tis pity, and pity 'tis 'tis true.'"

He paused to allow this quotation to sink in, his eyes watching Mrs. Field.

"Randall actually asked me to perform this mockery of marriage. In the church!"

"You refused, of course?" Mrs. Stockley exclaimed.

"Of course." He laughed at the question.

"I wonder," broke in a low voice, "what has become of Mrs. Randall?"

"Barbara!" ejaculated Mrs. Stockley. "What do these things matter to you?"

The others turned in some surprise, glancing with curiosity at the girl who had lately acquired prominence in their minds.

She stood on the veranda, in her white tennis frock, the band of something soft and blue around her dark hair half hidden among the luxuriant waves. Her small piquant face, with its little straight nose and wild-rose coloring, seemed extremely young and undeveloped; but the tenderly curved mouth, the sensitive lips, the steady, pensive depths of the shadowy eyes, spoke of vibrant possibilities. Not everybody was allowed to see into those eyes.

"I liked her," she replied to her mother's question. But this was no reason in Mrs. Stockley's eyes.

"A very bad woman, my dear, whom you must forget. I regret ever allowing you to associate with her," she said, with the decision she could sometimes assume.

With tennis-racquet clasped in her arms, the girl stood for a moment, slim and straight, looking down upon all these people who represented her world, within the horizon of whose views her life had been spent. Then she glanced across at the friend whose brief visits had always been red-letter days in the calendar of her mind.

"I wonder?" she said musingly. "Problems of that sort, involving such tremendous decisions, must be *terrible!*"

She gave a little shiver as if a chill had fallen upon her; then, stepping quickly down into the sunshine, she perched upon the arm of Mrs. Field's chair.

"No problems!" ejaculated her mother. "Her duty was quite plain. It always is."

"Still, of course," said the vicar, eying the girl kindly, "one must try to think mercifully of such people." He always spoke of "one," both in sermons and out of them.

"Sin is sin," Mrs. Stockley replied, with her usual lack of originality. "It is most reprehensible. Especially among people we know," she added.

Mrs. Field opened her lips to speak, then wisely closed them again; and her glance wandered away to the three hills rising, heather-covered, like miniature mountains, upon the horizon. But a vague suspicion that the line of demarcation between right and wrong might not after all be quite so easily decipherable, caused Barbara, a creature of adorable impulse, to seize her friend's hand, under cover of the others' talk.

"If I had a terrific problem to decide, I should come to you!" she exclaimed. "You never condemn."

"I don't see how you can without feeling the actual motives which make the problem. That's what counts. Isn't it? What makes wrong in one person right in another? Besides," she added with a little laugh, "it is largely a matter of luck that we are not in the same boat."

"What *do* you mean?" ejaculated Miss Horne, overhearing this last sentence.

Mrs. Field looked her fully, but kindly, in the face.

"Are we not lucky if we are not exposed to these temp-

tations? Given such problems to decide? If we were, how do we know what might be the result?"

"Really!" exclaimed Miss Horne. "They are only 'problems' to weak natures. We should all know what to do, I *hope!*" She turned away, not wishing to become involved in such foolish talk; and Mrs. Field glanced at Barbara.

"Don't look so solemn, Bab; or I shall think you have one! Perfectly insurmountable!"

"My only problem is my honeymoon; but—it really *is* one," the girl replied, her brow a little puckered.

Mrs. Field looked at her again, rather quickly.

"Hugh wants to go to some remote spot, just a replica of Darbury, where we shall be buried alive! He suggests his father's estate in Devonshire. There are golf and hunting, and he could attend to things with the agent at the same time."

"Well?"

"Well! Isn't it so horribly—*sensible?* For a honeymoon!" The other made no response for a moment; but the pressure of her fingers told the girl that here, as usual, everything was understood.

"It is so—exactly Hugh, dear old boy," she said at last. "You wouldn't care for him to change, Bab?"

"Oh, no, of course not!" But the little pucker was still there.

Suddenly she sat upright and changed the subject. "Where is your cousin? I want to meet him. I want to hear all about our expedition."

"He should be here any moment. Ah! Here is Tony. Tony, where is Alan?"

Tony Field had just come from London. In Darbury he was regarded as the perfect pattern of a subal-

tern, from his well-oiled hair to his beautifully polished boots. His engagement to Sybil Burford, the local doctor's very young and very smart daughter, had provided another of the thrills of this eventful year.

"Alan can't come until to-morrow," he replied; and a wave of disappointment passed over the party.

"He must be most interesting!" Miss Horn exclaimed. "I understand he has traveled extensively, too? In what country, chiefly?"

"Over most of the globe," replied Mrs. Field, seating herself at the tea-table. "His uncle was a naturalist. They spent years together in the South Sea Islands and India. At one time Alan was engineering in Africa. Lately he has been developing aviation in Australia, as you probably know."

"Do you think he would give a lecture at the Institute?"

Barbara was wondering why Mrs. Field smiled into the tea-cups, when the vicar struck in:

"His machine is a wonderful invention, isn't it? Some patent to do with alighting, I think?"

"Yes. It is the realization of very keen ambitions."

"Perhaps," suggested Miss Horne, "Captain Croft would write an article for next month's number of the *Lucky Bag* about his invention, or his travels?"

"Ask him to-morrow," suggested Mrs. Field. "Tony, don't you think Dolly Davies and Alan would get on famously together if they went alone?"

Barbara looked up in alarm. "But . . ." Seeing the smile and humor lurking in the other's eyes, she subsided into curiosity. Tony gave a shout of laughter.

"What a holy time you'd have, Miss Dolly!"

"Why would she?" demanded Barbara.

"She'd be mending his clothes and cleaning his boots in a few weeks! Probably cooking his food, if he liked the idea!'"

Miss Dolly laughed at this extravagance. But Barbara's already keen curiosity got the better of her.

"Why?" she asked again.

"He's such a determined, cocksure fellow—expects everybody to cave in to him. When he gets an idea in his head he stops at nothing until he is top-dog of it. And he has the rummiest ideas!"

"He doesn't sound very attractive," observed the girl, glancing at Mrs. Field in some wonder.

"He is, perhaps, rather full of his own ambitions and may seem a little—hard," she replied. "But that is because there have been no softening influences in his life. Tony doesn't altogether understand him."

"Who does?" laughed Tony. "A dark horse, Bab! You may as well both decide to give in to him at the beginning, for you will eventually! He can let off steam better than any man I know."

"He did famous things in the war," Mr. Horne interposed, as if to rebuke this lightness in one too young to appreciate greatness. "'One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward.' I shall be proud to shake his hand."

"Have you noticed," put in Miss Brown, who wrote sweet verses for the *Lucky Bag*, "how, against the clouds, an aeroplane looks like a flying cross? I think it seems so symbolic. These brave, brave men! I wonder if in a crash, they have sufficient time just to—to—remember their souls——"

"Alan would have time to swear, *anywhere!*" Tony interrupted, with a glance at Barbara. But the garden

gate had clicked once more; and she turned from the horrified face of the poet to wave her hand to the figure coming round the bushes.

"Here is Hugh," she said, a note of satisfaction in her voice.

Hugh waved back, walking in his usual leisurely manner down the garden path with Shag, his Airedale terrior, close at heel. Of medium height and fresh complexion, he ever seemed surrounded by an air of utter contentment, of unemotional appreciation of life's gifts; in spite of the shade which, since the war, had replaced one of his smiling brown eyes. Hugh was never in a hurry, nor in any way ruffled. He had taken the war and all its loathsome experiences in the same calm, good-natured, simple fashion that he accepted the every-day country life which to him was entirely sufficient.

"I couldn't come earlier," he explained, greeting everybody in the thoughtfully pleasant manner which made old ladies adore him. "We have been getting in the late hay, and were short-handed. A wagoner is away ill."

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed the vicar, handing round cakes in the practised way of sociable clergymen. "I saw him this morning. He started to attend chapel instead of church, a few weeks ago; so I took the opportunity of asking him why it was. He told me he was a 'low man' and intended to remain so!"

Hugh laughed in his easy way, lowering himself with carefully balanced tea-cup to the grass by Barbara's chair. But Mr. Horne's face bore no trace of amusement.

"This 'High Church' and 'Low Church' business—what a trial it is!" he sighed.

Mrs. Field, unaware that she shared with the wagoner

a prominent place in the list of wanderers needing prayer, looked at him with quick sympathy. As he saw the light, through his strong pince-nez, so, she realized, did he struggle toward it. And of all the many "pathways leading to the stars," who can judge which is the best? She registered an inward vow to take her cousin to his church on Sunday.

Barbara, on the other hand, glanced at him with scarcely veiled irritation as he continued: "However, I like the old fellow's honesty. After all, one can usually learn something from everybody."

"Yes," she murmured to Hugh; "but often it is only patience."

III

Hugh and Barbara walked home together in the evening. The sun was setting in a sea of flame as they crossed the common; the white sandy paths wound among the heather up to the horizon and were lost in an eternity of red-gold splendor. The tall pines of the woods near Darbury House loomed dark, mysterious, silently splendid, like huge somber pillars of some cathedral entered at night. Barbara, sensitive and imaginative to the point of nervousness, slipped a hand through her companion's arm as they entered the gloom. Once more the much discussed subject of their honeymoon absorbed their minds.

"I really don't care about the idea of some desert place packed away from the world," the girl owned. "A honeymoon ought to be spent somewhere—where it is—oh, wonderful! Where we can reach the real heart of—of things together, Hughie."

"Where it's warm is more to the point, for December," he broke in prosaically.

With a quick intake of the breath, she half withdrew her arm; but he pressed it to his side.

"Where do you suggest, Bab, old thing? I really don't mind. After all," he said, with one of the clumsy attempts at expression which were dear to the girl, "to be together is the main point; isn't it?"

The wistfulness vanished from her lips in the sudden radiant smile which transformed her whole face.

"Yes. But we need not be actually *buried* together—on our honeymoon! That can come later. When I return from Australia, I shall probably have more brain-waves about it all."

"I hope," he replied, "you will be so sick of travel, that you will be content to—to——"

"Do precisely what we do here, now? Oh, Hughie!" She gave his arm an impatient shake. Then words tactfully spoken that afternoon recurred to her mind. Impulsively she squeezed the arm she had shaken. "Oh, but you're just adorably yourself, you dear old thing!"

Hugh laughed. "That's pretty obvious! Give me a kiss"—he bent his head toward her—"and be your adorable self, too. You have seemed different, lately, Bab."

"Oh, rubbish!" she exclaimed quickly, ruffling his hair with her fingers. But the words sent a stab of compunction through her; for she knew their truth.

Slowly, subtly, the spirit of change, which like a great wind was moving over the face of the world—uprooting age-old trees, scattering the dust, and the stored-up gold of centuries—had found its way into her heart and left her restless, puzzled.

A silence fell upon them as they left the woods and strolled down the main road to Darbury Lake. Here, in an angle formed by a side lane, Lake Cottage screened

its jumble of chimneys by sheltering pines; the little house, built up from two laborers' cottages, which since her father's death, ten years ago, had been the girl's home.

Shag, searching the reeds for possible rats, disturbed several waterfowl; fluttering, screaming, they sped across the placid surface which reflected rosily the afterglow of the setting sun. Otherwise, save for the intermittent croaking of frogs, all was deathly still.

In after years Hugh always vividly remembered that evening walk together and the quiet time beside the lake, with the two apparently trivial interruptions.

The silence was presently broken by the noisy footsteps of a village girl who hurried down the side lane and vanished into the main road.

"That was Jenny Grant," Barbara murmured. "She was crying. I wonder what is the matter?"

"Was she? Don't know, I'm sure." Hugh was more intent upon a movement among the reeds close by. Suddenly he started forward. "Look out! There's a rat!"

Deaf and blind to all save sport, he called to Shag and dashed among the gorse-bushes in pursuit. But the rat, doubling, darted swiftly back by Barbara's feet. With an involuntary scream, she ran into the lane, narrowly escaping collision with a motor-car traveling swiftly toward the main road. She was aware of the dark shape looming almost upon her; the sudden harsh sound of brakes instantly applied; then a voice of outraged fury:

"Why the hell don't you look where you are going?"

Speechless, she staggered back against the bank. Then trembling with the shock, she saw through the dusk a man's tall figure swinging itself out of the driver's seat and towering over her.

"Are you hurt?" he inquired, in the same impatient curt tones.

Now in Darbury, if a man so far forgot himself as to show real feeling—much less swear—before ladies, he was covered with confusion, full of apology. Indignant, Barbara drew herself up and flashed him a glance of furious hostility. But the look she met in return was so piercingly direct, so impersonally cold, that she speedily lowered her eyes again.

"No; *thank* you!" she replied, icily.

For a moment he hesitated, glancing round at the gorse-bushes from which she had appeared.

"Why did you dash out like that?"

She made no reply.

"Something frightened you," he affirmed. "What was it? Traps? Poachers? Or——"

"Merely a rat." To cover a sudden feeling of foolishness, she threw all the dignity she could muster into the words.

"A rat!" The scorn in the laugh with which he turned away made her cheeks burn angrily.

"You are driving without lights!" she flung after him, as he swung himself back into the car. He made no reply; but when the car moved forward he turned toward her.

"You're sure it wasn't a mouse?" he called; and she fancied she saw the flash of white teeth, as he shot away into the main road.

The knowledge that one is being laughed at is unpleasant in itself; but to feel the laughter deserved makes it much worse. Barbara, as usual, took refuge in Hugh, who was more interested in the slaughter which Shag had just effected. Quite lacking imagination, he also laughed.

"If you run under people's cars, you can't expect loving remarks! Look here, I'm coming down for a swim in the morning. Will you come too?"

She shook her head. "Mother would be furious. She thinks bathing in the lake 'dangerous, common, and utterly rep-re-hensible.' "

"Need she know?" suggested the practical Hugh, seating himself upon the bank and drawing out his cigarette case.

"If she didn't find out, Aunt Mary would!" sighed the girl. With a precautionary glance at the one visible window of Lake Cottage, she helped herself to a cigarette, and slid more out of sight under the bank. "Besides," she went on between puffs, "you know I can never swim in the lake."

"That's only because you're a duffer!" Hugh retorted frankly. "You can swim in the sea, which is far more dangerous. So why not here?"

"Ah, but the sea buoys you up! You simply let the waves take you. I can do that; but here"— she gave a dissatisfied glance over the water at their feet—"there is no life in this stagnant pool! I just sink."

She sat lost in thought for a while, then abruptly turned to Hugh.

"Only twelve days more, Hughie: then I shall be gone. It will really have happened!" She breathed the last words almost incredulously, half to herself.

"Heartless little beast!" He sent a curl of smoke up into the still air.

"Heartless? Oh, no! Hughie." She sat upright. "If only I could make you understand! But you are so gloriously content. Before we settle down I must—I simply *must*—feel life! Just once. I can't explain——"

"*Feel?*" he laughed, a little bewildered, as he often was when endeavoring to follow her darting flights of thought. She was apt to go off on little jaunts of her own, leaving him standing firmly on the ground searching for binoculars.

"What do you mean? Don't you always 'feel'? When it's hot, or freezing——"

"It—it never seems to you," she went on, stumbling over the search for words to express the inexpressible, "as if something were—missing, or—wrong in some way. Does it? As if our lives were petty, empty, and all of us rather stupid? As if——" Abruptly she stood up and flung her cigarette-end into the lake. "I want to get away—to *live* just for a time in the real world, not in a backwater! Where masses of human beings we know nothing of suffer, struggle—sin—really *live!* Perhaps then I shall discover——"

"What?" Hugh laughed a little. The turmoil of life seemed incongruous with this girl's delicacy of form and features.

She shook her head, laughing back mirthlessly. "That's what I don't know."

Hugh caught her hand and pulled her down again beside him. "Then come out of the clouds," he said.

Something resembling a douche of cold water subdued her to silent acquiescence; her brows knit again in puzzled wonder. Then, as she felt the warmth of Hugh's fingers a rush of tenderness chased away the little chill. Impulsively, as ever, she stooped and laid her lips to his.

"Not heartless, Hughie! Never that. If you were only coming too, all would be perfect!"

And Hugh was content. However far the flight, his Barbara always eventually came back to him.

His steadfast refusal to accompany her had caused Barbara, as it had everybody else, no surprise. Like many similar, wholesome young men with average brains, he possessed little enterprise beyond the interests of his immediate groove. The glory of a cross-country run with hounds, the whirl of a golf ball, the sudden rush of partridges' wings, were what he understood. With these, and Barbara beside him, part of the routine of life, his days were abundantly full. And she understood the charm of these pursuits, shared some of them with him; but——

When Barbara reached home that evening, she found the house in darkness. Feeling her way through the little hall, she descended the step leading to the drawing-room. There the three ladies were sitting in gloom, storm-clouds obviously hovering about them.

"At last!" ejaculated her mother. "You left Mrs. Field's before we did. *May* one ask what you have been doing?"

"I was with Hugh. What is the matter, mother?"

"Surely you see enough of Hugh without loitering about in the dark like a common village girl? You knew Martha would be out to-night——"

"Oh, I quite forgot!"

"And the lamps were not trimmed this morning."

"Oh! I—I forgot those, too. I am sorry, mother." Not waiting for the storm to burst, she hurried to the empty kitchen, and began to rectify this stupendous error. Many weak people, Mrs. Stockley among them, usually gain their ends in life by reducing others to a state of passive acquiescence for the sake of peace. Remonstrance or self-justification were entirely wasted upon her. Barbara knew this. After carrying in the tall

shaded lamps, she hurriedly set about getting the supper. But unfortunately, in her haste, the soup became a little smoked over Martha's banked-up kitchen fire.

After two mouthfuls, Mrs. Stockley laid down her spoon. "It is not fit to eat. Don't eat it, Mary. Dolly, leave it. Remove the plates, Barbara." As the girl rose to obey, the cold voice went on: "I am, indeed, sorry for Hugh! A wife who forgets every duty to her husband; who can not, in emergencies, prepare food fit for his consumption——"

"What do you mean, mother?" Barbara was moved to useless remonstrance. "I have not failed in any duty to Hugh, yet."

"You know quite well what I mean. Don't prevaricate."

A heavy silence enveloped the rest of the meal, until Aunt Dolly at last broke it, with well-meaning intent.

"A message was left for you, Bab, by the secretary of the Girls' Club——"

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Mrs. Stockley. "She was waiting when we arrived. I told her to come back later."

"What is the message?" Barbara asked listlessly.

"Something is wrong with the accounts. You looked after everything while she was away. I hope you did not muddle them? Oh, and Mr. Horne wants you to go to the vicarage at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, to discuss new plans for the catechism classes. He forgot to tell you."

"But I have to see to my stall at the fête."

"There will be time for both. Have you prepared this week's Sunday-school lesson yet?"

"No."

"Ah! I thought not. You won't have time for that

to-morrow." Mrs. Stockley rose from the table and mumbled a grace. "When Mrs. Field is here, you forget everything! You must do it to-night."

Barbara said nothing. This was but one of three hundred and sixty-five days all much alike in each year. She cleared away the supper; wrestled with the thick-headed secretary of the Girls' Club over accounts which, after an exhaustive half-hour, turned out to be correct; buried herself in the preparation of an orthodox Sunday-school lesson; then betook herself to bed.

Opening the window wide, she leaned out, inhaling deep breaths of the flower-scented air. "Only twelve more days!" she muttered, with a catch of the breath. She fell on her knees beside the low casement, her loosened hair in glorious profusion round her. "Then—Life!" she said.

IV

A Fête seems to grow out of village life like some painful, incurable excrescence, with annual regularity. Usually there is some philanthropy to provide excuse; but failing all else there are always church funds—eminently respectable, if somewhat vague. Clergymen especially thrive upon these events, and the presence of all the women for miles round can safely be counted upon.

The Darbury fête, being in aid of a hospital fund, was held in the grounds of a neighboring mansion, the winter garden of which was utilized for dancing. A local brass band provided music; but only the villagers, servants, or other rustics were expected to dance. That was understood. The *élite* of the neighborhood merely looked on at this as at other side-shows.

Barbara and Miss Brown were in charge of the sweets and tobacco-stall, an offshot of that labeled "Home Products." Here were sold eggs, butter, and other recog-

nizably useful goods; and here presided Mrs. Brent-Hewson, her monumental form swathed in rustling black silk, her head crowned by a very dreadnought in millinery. After a morning spent in preparations for the fête, and an afternoon behind the stall, Barbara was feeling unutterably bored.

Then suddenly she was aware of a man's figure standing near; and knew, without looking up, that she was being intently scrutinized.

"I think you are so brave to fly to Australia!" Miss Brown exclaimed. "And with a strange man, too! Doesn't Mr. Hugh mind?"

Barbara laughed at this typical Darbury remark.

"No! Of course not."

"But suppose you don't like him?"

"That won't matter. He is only the pilot."

Glancing up as she spoke, she gave an involuntary start at finding the same direct, piercing look fastened upon her that she had experienced the night before. It was not the rude stare of a man who appraises women as if they were horses; rather did it seem to scatter non-essentials, and to probe to the spirit within. For a moment her own eyes seemed held by a curious compulsion. She felt disconcerted quick remembrance of the previous night's incident, and her recent little outburst caused a flush to overspread her sensitive face.

At the same instant Mrs. Field came briskly round the corner of the tent. "Ah!" she cried. "You are here first, Alan." Then, turning to Barbara, "I want to introduce you both," she said, taking an arm of each.

And Barbara, feeling uncomfortably self-conscious, too bewildered to do more than stammer a conventional greeting, was forced once more to lift her eyes to his.

They were deep-set and gray like those of his cousin, but lacking the tenderness which lurked in hers; the little lines at their corners, surely betokening humor, appeared out of place. In her rapid glance she was dimly aware of great height, broad shoulders, and a lean, deeply tanned, clean-shaven face.

"Alan borrowed a car and turned up last night, after all." Mrs. Field smoothed over the impending awkwardness; but at that moment Mrs. Brent-Hewson called her away.

"Yes," remarked Barbara, with some emphasis and a world of meaning.

"Yes!" he echoed in the same tone. "We have met before."

There fell a silence, which the girl racked her brains in vain to break. She was conscious of feeling acutely disappointed. This was the man who to her inexperienced mind had seemed a dim, unreal figure crowned by a halo of glorious achievement! This the heaven-sent deliverer, who, unknowingly, had offered that hidden self the one chance of stretching its cramped wings! This man, for whom the previous evening she had conceived such a strong dislike, was to be their pilot over thousands of miles. Even if, as she had told Miss Brown, it did not matter, it was nevertheless very disappointing.

"I'm glad it was no worse," he remarked abruptly, obviously in the tone of one expected to say something, but unused to little conventional pleasantries. This sounded like a belated attempt at apology. With Hugh's common-sense remark in her mind, she met it half-way.

"I suppose it was my own fault; but——"

"Oh, entirely!" he broke in, as if there were no question about it.

The rest of her sentence remained unuttered, and she made no further attempt at conversation. Tony Field's words of the day before, evidently spoken from experience, recurred to her. Dimly, yet instinctively, she realized the truth in them. . . .

From a distance came the crack of rifles, where Hugh was in charge of the shooting-range. . . .

Before the pause became uncomfortable, Mrs. Field returned and insisted upon having tea. On these occasions tea suggests a gathering of the clans. All the little cliques of the neighborhood meet in the large marquee and discuss the news they have gleaned. Miss Davies usually accumulated the lion's share. She seemed to attract scandalous tit-bits as a tree attracts lichen; therefore she was a popular figure.

Barbara was detained at the entrance; and Mrs. Field looked at her cousin with kindly enthusiasm, when they found a vacant table.

"Well, Alan? Isn't she a dear girl? And pretty?"

He responded indifferently; stooped down to tuck his panama hat under the seat; then sat up and ran his fingers through his thick dark hair.

"Damned hot in here, Madge!"

She glanced round apprehensively; then leaned toward him. "Alan, for heaven's sake don't upset any of these good people, or she may not be allowed to go after all!"

A smile of extraordinary infectiousness lit up his face, transfiguring it: the lines of humor proved that they were not, after all, misplaced.

"Try a muzzle, Madge! How the dickens do I know what may upset the old darlings——"

"Hush! Here is Mrs. Stockley."

The grim mask of reserve quickly covered his face again.

The Darburyites, hearing that the stranger had at last arrived, soon clustered round for introductions, anxious to impress him with their own intelligence. But, with Barbara, they were doomed to bitter disappointment; for this hero refused to be lionized, and declined to talk "shop." Their intelligent overtures left him unimpressed; no pumping drew other than the briefest trickle in reply. Unequivocal refusal met the requests for lectures or articles, at last daunting even the zealous editor of the *Lucky-Bag*. Enthusiasm gradually waned. The stranger was allowed to eat his tea in peace; Miss Davies, who had established herself on guard beside him, noticed that he ate a large one.

Miss Brown, from her aloofness, covertly watched the disappointing lion with an admiration which caused prolific inspirations. A man of such fine physique, with so determined a jaw, must, she felt sure, possess a wonderful soul. Clad in armor, she visualized a kind of Lancelot-Galahad combination, full of gentle courtesy and tender chivalry, searching for grails and distressed damsels.

"Oh, damn the beastly thing!" The vigor of the words scattered her dreams to the four winds. The other Darburyites ceased talking, and looked at him askance.

"A wasp!" he explained, shaking the insect off his hand and grinding it under his heel. A painful silence followed. Then, to Mrs. Field's immense relief, a diversion was caused by the appearance of Major Randall and Miss French. She waved cordially to them; but a stiffening of the spine seemed to overtake the others; their eyes avoided the couple.

Miss Davies seized this priceless opportunity of recounting the new scandal to a stranger in low tones of mystery and disgust.

"It has been a great shock to everybody," she concluded. "His wife at least showed her true colors; but we considered his morals beyond reproach. It only shows," she added complacently, "how little *anybody* can be trusted, nowadays."

"Why?" asked Croft, curiously. "Why do you doubt his morals now?"

She looked mildly surprised. "In my work," she began heavily, "I see too much——"

"If people do suspicious things," broke in Mrs. Stockley, "they must expect to be doubted. They should consider public opinion before acting so rashly."

"Oh?" he ejaculated, a smile hovering around his lips. "But the public only views things through its own mud, usually. So what would be the good of that? Nobody would ever get anywhere!"

The two sisters gazed at him blankly, then at each other; Mrs. Field plunged to the rescue.

"Miss Davies doesn't believe in friendship between men and women, Alan," she said, smiling pleasantly upon that lady. "She doesn't think we are necessary to one another, apart from marriage as—as—complements to our one-sided natures."

"Are we?" he laughed. "I'm not aware of having ever pined for a complement!"

This remark caused him to rise in Miss Davies' estimation.

"Barbara is talking to them—Major Randall and Miss French!" exclaimed Mrs. Stockley, surprise and annoyance in her voice. He looked quickly across the tent to

where the girl stood near the entrance; then back at the other women's faces, as if making mental notes of an interesting problem.

This was Barbara's first direct contact with people whose lives stretched below the shallows of convention. Aware of the disapproval in her mother's face; accustomed all her life to the Darbury traditions; conscious of the confused, traitorous ideas surging within her own heart; she felt and looked confused, as she greeted the pair. As soon as possible she hurried away to her own circle, fully prepared for the maternal displeasure. . . . "You must remember they are no longer on my visiting list," finished her mother; and looking up, the girl encountered again that penetrating, disconcerting regard. . . .

Mrs. Brent-Hewson presently sailed in, accompanied by Miss Dolly Davies. After the necessary introductions, Mrs. Field, with a glance of mingled warning and humor at her cousin, hurried away to her flower-stall.

It was against Mrs. Brent-Hewson's principles to show interest in the views or achievements of others. She sank into the chair vacated by Mrs. Field, and sat silently stolid for some minutes, ostensibly munching cake while mentally digesting everybody else in the tent. All at once, remembering the domestic crisis in the cowshed at the "House on the Moor," she wheeled round upon Croft.

"Has Mrs. Field's cow come in to-day?" she asked, with startling abruptness.

He gazed vacantly at her for a moment. Suddenly, comprehension dawning in his eyes, his lips twitched.

"Perhaps she will stroll round after tea?" he suggested, with disarming innocence.

By appearing a fool you generally discover the foolish-

ness in others. Mrs. Brent-Hewson fixed him with a cold pensive stare.

"I meant," she explained heavily, "has the cow *calved* yet?"

"Oh? I don't know." He leaned forward to Barbara. "Can you tell me if Mrs. Field's cow has become a mother yet?"

The lips, open to bite a bun, remained open. He stooped to pick up the fallen bun; then caught the eye of Miss Dolly, who was convulsed with silent laughter. From that moment he and she became firm friends.

"I scarcely expected," remarked Mrs. Brent-Hewson scathingly, "to see the cow at the fête! Your knowledge of agriculture is obviously limited."

"I am a child in such matters," he agreed warmly. "When does she go out?"

"Go out?" echoed the bewildered lady.

"Yes. If she 'came in' to produce an heir, when does she go out again? I have never studied the—*accouchement,* isn't it?—of a cow."

The representative of agriculture deliberately turned and spoke to somebody else. He had sunk for ever in Darbury's estimation.

"A vulgar ignorant man," Miss Horne confided later to her disillusioned brother. "It is strange. But of course Mrs. Field's ideas are weird. . . ."

And Mrs. Brent-Hewson, as she drove her husband home—an insignificant cypher low beside her on the box seat of her dog-cart—expressed decided views upon the lack of real intelligence among men.

After tea, the disturber of the dovecot whirled away a breathless Aunt Dolly, overruling all expostulations, and insisted upon sampling all the side-shows.

"Come along," he urged, when she hesitated beside the swing-boats. "Let us stuff all these youngsters into them; then try to loop the loop." And Mrs. Stockley, talking with a few County friends near by, was rendered well-nigh breathless upon beholding her younger sister, surrounded by delighted swarms of village children, shoot up wildly toward the sky. . . . Then unlimited cocoa-nuts were knocked down by Alan and distributed among an admiring group of boys; he smashed numerous pipes smoked by a hideous "Aunt Sally"; and won Hugh's unbounded approval by hitting the bull's-eye nearly every time. You may reach the hearts of some men *via* their stomachs; but you shot into Hugh's through his gun.

When at last Aunt Dolly was captured and taken home to safety by her sisters, her companion, after helping his cousin to sell flowers for a short time, wandered off upon further search for occupation. . . .

Slowly, to Barbara, the time wore on. More and more weary of the monotony, sick of the smell of chocolate, she became consumed with restlessness. Miss Brown's gentle patience, however, never wavered. These affairs were to her the breath of life. . . .

All the social world had left long ago. Distant rifle-shots proved Hugh's trade to be brisk. He was catching the men in dozens now. From the glass walls of the winter garden came the exhilarating, if garish, strains of dance music, tantalizing in their infectious rhythm. Barbara hummed the tune, tapping her foot in unison, occasionally surprising her companions by performing a few revolutions round the tent. In the middle of one of these she halted abruptly, for a shadow had fallen across the rays of the sun streaming athwart the stall. . . .

Miss Brown, seeing her hero, hurried to supply the

needs of his soul. He bought lavishly, stuffed the packages into his pocket; then deliberately turned to Barbara.

"Come and dance with me," he said.

Her face expressed blank astonishment.

"Oh!" she exclaimed confusedly. "I—we—only the villagers usually dance here."

"Oh, good lord!"

The amused contempt in his voice made her flush. Then, conscious of having given a wrong impression of detestable snobbery, she felt furious with herself. Why was it that this man continually seemed to put her into a foolish position? Was it on purpose, she wondered?

"You never swerve from convention, I suppose?" he asked, watching her sensitive face in his disconcerting manner.

She looked away, uncomfortably self-conscious.

"I—oh——" She gave an embarrassed laugh. An opening door brought a louder riot of music flooding in with the evening sunshine. "I—really don't know."

Then some queer, psychological wave seemed to pass across the sweet-stall. It brought a strange current of air from the great Unknown without, from towering mountains and deep seas scarcely dreamed of in this pretty corner of orthodoxy. And it emanated from the figure standing motionless before her, whose very appearance seemed symbolical of freedom—the freedom of mind, the freedom from petty tyrannies, which is only gained by depth of vision, breadth of outlook, contact with the forces whose existence was beginning to stir faint echoes within her soul.

"Come!" he exclaimed suddenly, an undertone of impatience sounding in his word.

"Very well," she said in a low voice. "I will come."

He threw back his head a little, and smiled again.

V

To the swaying rhythm of a hackneyed tune, the rustics, tradespeople, and servants of the neighborhood performed their parts. That is to say, some frisked merrily around; others, hot and perspiring, puffed around; and others, with terrific solemnity, conscientiously trod each step around. But they all called it waltzing, whatever the movement; and—the chief thing that mattered—they all enjoyed themselves immensely.

The appearance of Barbara with a stranger caused a ripple of excitement; for the unwritten law in these matters is rigid. Those who break it suffer as much comment and criticism as a prime minister.

No modern affectation showed in Croft's dancing. He abandoned himself to the rhythm of the music, with an ease which swept the girl along in sympathetic exhilaration. She forgot the imperfect floor, the clumsy couples, the staring eyes, her instinctive dislike of this strange man, and surrendered herself to the rare joy of perfect harmony in movement. When, for an instant, she glanced up at her partner, she saw in his face a corresponding light which filled her with a momentary sense of fellowship.

Afterward, they strolled out on the terrace, flooded in the red gold of the setting sun. The subtle perfumes of earth and hay, the fragrances of unnamed flowers, rose from gardens and meadows. Barbara sat upon the low parapet, dreamily inhaling the soft scents. Croft flung his long legs over and drew out his cigarettes. Presently she found his glance fixed upon her.

"Well?" he asked, without preliminaries. "What about our little trip? Have you counted all the risks?"

"Risks? No! Or I might never get there!"

His quick look of approval was lost on the girl, as she glanced away with a laugh.

"When there is a chance of getting your heart's desire, would you count risks?"

"No!" he ejaculated warmly. "That's my creed."

From the determined lines of his well-cut lips, she judged this to be the truth.

"But your 'heart's desire'?" he went on; "what do you mean by that?"

She flushed faintly, crumbling bits of mortar between her fingers with an air of abstraction; the shy reserve in her nature ever made personal talk difficult.

"Surely you have that?" he suggested boldly, waving his cigarette toward the diamond scintillating on her finger.

"Oh, yes. Yes. I have, of course, in that way," she replied hurriedly.

The band struck up a stirring jazz tune, a medley bringing hints of tom-toms, drums, rattling castanets, the uncouth music of the East. . . .

"Oh!" she cried involuntarily, starting up; then sitting down again. "But you could never understand," she muttered.

"What?" He watched her closely, his cigarette burning, forgotten, between his fingers.

"The craving to *live* for a time! To get out into the world; to—to *experience* everything instead of just reading about it all; to—feel life itself! In huge cities, among vast crowds. I want to find out——" She hesitated, looking away over the meadows, with a puzzled frown. "Something seems lost, missing in some way. I—I can't explain." She turned back to him, the color in

her face heightened. But he did not laugh as Hugh would have done.

"'Huge cities'?" he queried slowly. "You think you will find it in them? Why not in remote villages?"

"Oh, no!" she cried. "Nothing ever happens in them! They are like stagnant pools."

"Something will happen, some day: the most stagnant pool sometimes gets flooded. Then you may regret it."

"No," she said with decision. "I could never regret anything that meant experience—adventure—of some sort! But villages are only full of little obscurities. I want to sample bigger things——"

"They will be but 'little obscurities' in fresh places," he interrupted. "The whole world is only composed of little notes, you know, and their reverberations. Some get more stress, and their echoes have more wide-reaching effects; that is all."

She listened in surprise. In her experience, talk like this, especially from a man, was unusual; but from one famed for a life of action it seemed little short of miraculous. Had a horse, renowned for good jumping, suddenly turned and quoted poetry to her, she would scarcely have been more astonished.

"Well," she said, enjoying the novelty of metaphor, "I want to feel the big 'reverberations'—to get among deep chords, in fact!"

"They might be rather overpowering." He shot a quick glance over the young eager face under its shady hat, and the dainty white-clad figure. "It's having some sort of right keynote that counts."

She knit puzzled brows, trying to follow his meaning. What keynote could there be to all the jumble of separate entities that make up life?

"What keynote the world uses is, I suppose, what you want to discover?" he asked.

"Do I? Is that it?" Eagerly she leaned toward him. "Oh, I wonder—— What do you think it is?"

He blew out a cloud of smoke; then smiled. "Goodness knows! Perhaps there isn't one. What private ones do we all use? Don't you often wonder, when you meet a number of new people——?"

"But I never do meet them! It is quite an event to meet a stranger," she assured him.

"Then this is one of your eventful days?"

"Oh, well, yes! I suppose it is," she owned, smiling. He smoked in silence for a time, as if pondering; then threw away his cigarette, and spoke briskly.

"Well, you shall soon meet plenty—of all nationalities. Even natives, in the Philippines."

Barbara came back to practical realities with a start. "Natives! Are they black? I should loathe them."

"Oh, no; surely not. I like them immensely."

She looked at him incredulously. "But why the Philippines?"

"I have to go to Borneo and the Philippines for the firm. Ordinarily we should go straight on, of course, from Singapore." He plunged into details of the journey, and she listened enthralled. To flash like a meteor over France, Italy, Egypt, India, with a few days at each landing-place, and the *détour* to the Pacific, exceeded all she had ever dreamed. The world—at last!

With a little encouragement he went on to tell her of other strange lands and stranger people, while the sun set in a big ball, and the band clashed out its wild merriment. For the first time she felt the actual winds of life blowing around her. . . .

Abruptly he broke off.

"But I have not yet discovered, in strange lands and crowded cities, what is wrong with the world! I hope you succeed in your 'heart's desire.' It's a tall order."

A subtle change in his manner gave her the impression again that, inwardly, he laughed at her. She felt, as she had over the incident of the rat, that to him she appeared foolishly feminine.

"Anyway, it is a wonderful chance. I am grateful to you for giving it to me," she replied, with stilted politeness.

"To me?" he asked; then gave a short laugh. "Oh, not at all. I am merely the pilot!"

She flushed crimson, remembering her own words at the sweet-stall. With a sense of relief, she saw Hugh hailing her from the terrace steps.

"Are you fixing up the trip?" he asked, joining them. Placing his hands on the girl's shoulders, he smiled across at Croft. "Look here! Will you please satiate Bab with travel, with sight-seeing, so that she returns fed up to the teeth? That will insure a peaceful honeymoon, and I shall be eternally obliged!"

Croft looked puzzled; and Barbara explained lucidly:

"Hugh wants to spend his honeymoon in his father's farmyard; and I want to go——"

"Somewhere in the moon," Hugh broke in. "So our only hope of a 'happy issue' as the prayer-book calls it, lies in you."

"Good lord!" laughed the other. "It's rather a curious position! When is the wedding?"

"On December twentieth. Be sure you send her back in time!"

Croft's face grew sober. In his quick decided fashion,

he swung his legs back over the parapet and stood up, facing Hugh.

"You are quite willing for her to go, I suppose?"

Both glanced at him, surprised at the earnestness of his tone.

"I know you will take the utmost care of her," Hugh replied.

"Of course."

Suddenly and unexpectedly the younger man held out his hand. Croft took it in a close grip; but Barbara gave an amused laugh.

She struck down lightly with her fingers; and the two hands fell apart.

. . . . . .

After having been carried away unexpectedly into a state of exaltation, into a world far removed from that of every-day life, one often falls back, when the cause is removed, into a state of peculiar depression, not unmixed with fear.

Thus it was with Barbara. During the drive home in Hugh's little car she sat close against his arm, unusually silent. Back among Darbury realities, the peculiar domination of Croft's personality removed, all the past exhilaration left her. She wondered at it; felt almost ashamed at her own disclosures; afraid of the force that had drawn them from her. When he had bidden her good night, the same subtle change was in his manner. It still seemed to her that beneath the coldness lurked a certain mockery. Again she had felt small, foolish, ridiculously feminine. . . .

Hugh broke in upon her meditations. "Croft's a topping shot!" he exclaimed warmly. "And Mrs. Field told me his golf handicap was scratch at one time——"

"Oh, Hughie!" she cried, "that doesn't make him likable."

"Why? Don't you like him?" He turned toward her, in genuine surprise.

She hesitated. "I'm not sure. I don't think I do. He is very—inscrutable. He leads you on to talk, when all the time he is only laughing at you. Hughie——"

"Yes?"

She leaned impulsively toward him, with a little sigh. "Oh, I don't know! I wish you were coming. You are so *safe.*"

Hugh laughed, and the car swerved in the narrow lane. "Bab, you've got the jimjams! Look here: about your return on the boat. I'm going to pay for that."

"Oh, no, no! It's dear of you, but I have a little money of my own: what father left me, you know——"

"Keep that in the bank. We may get 'broke' some day! I want to pay for this, Bab, dear; so don't be a perverse old thing. It—it brings you back to me, hang it all!"

She was infinitely touched, as she invariably was by his clumsy, rare attempts to express his feelings. A lump rose unexpectedly in her throat. "I almost wish I were not going. . . . I can't bear leaving you, Hughie."

"You never shall again!" he declared reassuringly. These impulsive moods were characteristic of his Barbara.

Her depression was not lifted by the conversation round the supper-table. The news of the dancing episode had preceded her, and Mrs. Stockley's ideas upon Position were outraged. Miss Dolly Davies' behavior, too, had shocked her sisters. The meal proceeded, therefore, to the accompaniment of dark innuendoes and grave warnings to the prospective travelers.

Miss Mary Davies, with her experience of the world (in Pension form) was full of wisdom.

"Men whose ideas upon morality are lax can never be trusted far," she said decisively. "And I greatly fear—this is in strict confidence of course! But you ought to be warned. I strongly suspect him of intemperance."

"Indeed? Why?" asked Miss Dolly, in surprise.

"I asked him about temperance work in Australia; but he took absolutely no interest in the subject. He even confessed he did not agree with taking the pledge!"

"Really?" ejaculated Mrs. Stockley.

"He called it a 'sign of weakness,' and 'a refuge for those who lack self-control.' With the usual nonsense about nothing being wrong unless it is abused."

Mrs. Stockley never did anything so unrefined as to snort. But she made a noise much resembling that action, and deigned no reply.

"Hugh likes him," said Barbara, making a weak effort to combat the strange misgivings which this talk was strengthening. The knowledge seeming to fortify her, she repeated it: "Hugh likes him very much."

When at last she slept, she dreamed confusedly. Lost in some dark place, she called passionately for Hugh, running on and on in terror; but, at last reaching the light, she found the path blocked by Croft's figure, with head flung back and arms outstretched. Far away, Hugh was ratting with Shag, unconscious of her trouble. . . .

Meanwhile, the cause of this perturbation leaned against one of the veranda posts at the "House on the Moor" smoking a pipe and watching Mrs. Field, who sat in a wicker chair near the lamp, checking the accounts of her stall. His level dark brows were drawn down in a frown, his eyes looked moody.

"Chuck those darned accounts, Madge!" he broke in, at last, without ceremony. "You've got one to settle with me."

She waved an expostulating arm, muttering incoherent sums below her breath. Presently, making a few quick marks with her pencil, she flung the note-book upon the table.

"What's the matter, Alan? And where are my cigs.? Oh, I'm sitting on them."

"There is no end to the matter," he retorted, striking a match for her. "You've landed me in a nice old mess! I seem to be regarded here as a kind of Cook's Guide."

Mrs. Field lay back in her chair with a gurgle of laughter.

"Laugh if it amuses you," he begged, with ironic politeness. "But when you pestered me to give your friends a joy-ride——"

"I—oh, Alan! You know very well you implored me to find two passengers!"

At least two passengers on both journeys, in addition to the crew, had been one of the stipulations in this test trip. The men who had come over in that capacity had been, unexpectedly, prevented from returning. Croft could not contradict her statement.

"But I didn't bargain for women," he protested rebelliously.

Mrs. Field sighed with mock resignation. "Alan, you are being tiresome again! I thought we had settled all that? At least," she laughed, "I hoped so—after quite a week's solid argument. You couldn't get any men you wanted. You were obliged to find somebody at short notice, or lose the contract. And you knew my reasons for wanting Barbara to go——"

"All excellent logic. Well?"

"Well! Why begin all over again? I thought you had agreed?"

"I have! Don't get in a spin, Madge. I was merely going to remonstrate with you for not coaching me in all my duties."

"Indeed? What are they?"

"Firstly, to teach a parson's daughter what is wrong with the world. Secondly, to pave the way for a farmyard honeymoon. Thirdly, to show off all the sideshows *en route* to two women. What the devil I'm going to do with them both I don't know!"

"That's what I would give a fortune to see!" she murmured.

"Run them up leaning towers, down catacombs, round pyramids, I suppose? Then come and open a girls' school? Will that suit you? I only hope," he added fervently, "they don't lose their heads if there is an accident. I couldn't stand hysterical women swarming around."

"Neither Barbara nor her aunt is hysterical. What is the matter, Alan?" she repeated. "It is unlike you to consider troubles before they arrive. Barbara is of a nervous temperament; but she has plenty of pluck."

"I wonder," he mused, half to himself, "how much she would have in any real test."

His companion glanced up in surprise at both the remark and the tone.

"You liked her?"

"She is interesting," was his non-committal reply. "She is standing on the scales and the balance is pretty level at present; but—I wonder which way it would swing——"

He broke off, and again his cousin contemplated him curiously. But he stood outside the radius of the shaded lamp; only the dark outline of his tall form was distinguishable.

"Barbara has received the call to Life, as opposed to mere existence," she said musingly. "And that is always irresistible. Her surroundings are very narrow. It is only fair to give her one chance."

"Certainly," he agreed. "But it's damned awkward—in the circumstances—to be the one to give it! There is always the danger that she may realize, if she wakes up——" He left the phrase unfinished.

"Yes," murmured his cousin. "But it is only fair ——" She too fell silent for a time. "Hugh is such a dear," she remarked at last, with apparent irrelevance.

But no further comment came from the surrounding darkness; and adroitly she turned the subject.

"What are you going to do afterward, Alan?"

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with a complete change of tone. He came quickly forward into the circle of light and sat astride a chair, facing her.

"I have great schemes, Madge—here!" tapping his forehead. "Schemes that will revolutionize civil aviation!"

She smiled at his characteristic, though unconscious, arrogance.

"You certainly aim pretty high," she murmured.

"I always aim at the top," he replied promptly. "If you only aim half-way you probably never get off the ground."

"That's true. Well?"

"It—you won't understand all the theory. It's an invention for alighting safely if the engines give out. About ninety per cent. of the fatal accidents would be

saved. And the boon to commerce, of course——! Look here! Let me show you, Madge." Seizing the pencil, he leaned eagerly forward, over his tilted chair-back, to the table. . . .

For the next half-hour Mrs. Field found herself submerged in diagrams, technical terms, minute scientific details of angles, balance, lift-drift ratio, stress, strain, and a hundred other items which, under the magic of his crisp, lucid explanations, became wonderful skeins in an ingenious pattern, instead of the jumble of colored silks comprising ignorance.

"So you see? The other old bus was only the thin wedge. But that patent has caught on. I've got my foot firmly on the ladder! Now I can go ahead; and in a few years——" He broke off with an exultant laugh, waving an arm as if to encircle the universe.

"It is all splendid, Alan! Splendid!" she cried enthusiastically. "But I always had faith in you. You manage to succeed in whatever you undertake."

"Oh, I never meant to fail! I have never failed yet."

She watched him silently for a few moments, a smile of almost motherly affection illuminating her kind face.

"You have no ambitions of another kind, yet? Of —marrying, for example?" she suggested unexpectedly.

"Good lord, no! I have no time nor inclination for that. Surely you are not becoming one of those idiots who think nobody's happiness is complete unless they are tied up in a matrimonial noose?"

"Oh, no!" she owned, smiling. "All the same, I think a life that has no time for love is not complete."

He looked at her under raised eyebrows, as he refilled his pipe.

"Implying——?"

"Well—yes! Implying!" she replied, with a laugh.

"You are wrong," he retorted. "Mine is complete!—Full up to the brim."

When she rose to go to bed, she took the muscular hand, and looked at the long clever fingers for a moment before pressing them warmly in her own.

"Don't become too much of a machine," she suggested tentatively.

"I can't!" he laughed, returning the pressure with a zest which was almost painful. "I'm about to become a Cook's Guide!"

VI

No clouds broke the panoply of blue from which the sun blazed like a ball of silver-white fire; the warm air was unstirred by any breath of wind.

Glittering like dragon-flies, several machines hummed and buzzed near the aerodrome, some rising on trial trips, others soaring far overhead, a few "looping" or diving down in spirals, as though intoxicated with the exhilaration of the summer morning. Occasionally one sank slowly to the ground, and sprang over the turf with a resilient airiness as if, like a feather, it might at any moment rise and blow away again.

A small crowd of people, including reporters and photographers, stood near the monster which loomed up stationary after a final trial flight; brooding, like a hawk that had marked some possible prey; ready to rise with a quiver of vast wings, hover for a moment, then swoop relentlessly down. . . . The sunlight flashed upon the four propellers and the engines, now so placid and silent.

Barbara, clad in the beaver-lined flying cap and leather coat which Hugh had given her, stood close beside him, watching the giant plane and its attendants somewhat

nervously. It was, after all, a big adventure to embark upon. . . . Hugh was very dear. . . .

The last days had whirled quickly by with preparations for her long journey added to the usual parish and household work which she was not expected to relinquish until the last moment. Only once had she again seen Croft. That was in church, the day after the fête; he stood beside Mrs. Field, looking quite out of place, in his loose flannels, among a congregation clad in its orthodox Sunday garments, chiefly of navy blue.

Mrs. Field had bidden Barbara farewell some days ago, and had gone to the famine areas of Central Europe on an organization campaign. Noticing the wistfulness of the girl's face, something had compelled her to turn back and kiss her again, when they parted.

"You don't regret going, Bab, dear?" she had asked.

Barbara shook her head vigorously. "No! I feel a little depressed over leaving Hugh; that's all. It seems as though something—I don't know what—were ending. I suppose that's natural upon going away for the first time? Is it?" she added anxiously.

Mrs. Field knew when to keep her thoughts to herself.

"Quite natural," she replied cheerfully. "And—Bab," she went on, hesitating a little, "if you need Alan's friendship for any reason, I think you would find it worth having."

"Oh," the girl said hastily, "I don't think he—we—I shall never quite understand him."

Feeling that to be likely, Mrs. Field said no more. She had sown the seed, if ever it were needed. . . .

Then the last night at home—— With luggage ready to be closed and strapped, she had looked around her familiar little room with mixed feelings. When next

she slept here, what would she have learned of the things beyond that life-long barrier of hills visible from her window?

With a warm rush of tenderness, she remembered that, upon her return, her new life as Hugh's wife would begin.

Taking the large photograph of him from the wall, she placed it carefully within her packed box.

Then, getting into bed, she blew out the candle. . . .

And now the moment of departure had come. While Aunt Dolly talked to the navigator, she remained silent beside the one sure anchor of her old life, that safety-valve to all her youthful moods. Hugh, also, was unusually silent, suddenly realizing that a parting of months lay before them.

Presently Croft appeared, looking big and alert in his flying kit, with an air of confidence about him which communicated itself, in some subtle way, to Barbara. Having been detained over a matter of form in the office, he hurried their start. As she followed her aunt up the steps, she stumbled a little, and he caught her hand. It was trembling, she knew; he shot her a quick glance, and she felt again the unpleasant sensation of smallness; as if, in that brief moment, all her fears and shrinkings of the past ten days were perceived.

Hugh followed her into the cabin, where she turned and clung to him. He drew her into his arms and kissed her with more passion than usual.

"We shall be married directly you return, Bab, darling," he said huskily, feeling a suspicious lump in his throat. "I—I'll meet you, when you come back. It won't be long."

Croft's back was visible in the pilot's seat.

Hugh knew that his Barbara's warm-hearted impulses occasionally resulted in moments of embarrassment. Gently loosening the clinging arms, he bade Aunt Dolly farewell. Then he turned to the cabin door, hesitated, came back, kissed Barbara's wet cheeks closely and hurriedly again, and ran down the steps.

The navigator and the mechanics, who had accompanied the machine from Australia, took their places. There followed the short regulation catechism between pilot and mechanics below, proving the last details to be in order. . . . Then the four powerful engines began their vibrating, deafening roar, seeming to pulsate through every fiber of those standing near. The propellers swung round, glittering.

Croft leaned down and waved farewell; then he gave the signal. The chocks were withdrawn from before the wheels. Slowly, the machine glided away.

But with quick transition, the movement merged into the swift run of a bird seeking cover. Faster and yet faster, it became a wild roaring race across the grass, which soon the little wheels failed to touch, as, at an incredibly short distance, the aeroplane rose lightly from the ground. Rising ever higher, with infinite grace, she soared up into the limitless blue; then swung round in a wide sweep, sparkling in the sunlight as if studded with jewels.

A murmur of admiration for masterful handling rose from the group of spectators.

Thrice she circled, high above the heads of those who watched. Then, sure of her capabilities, she turned with a final upward curve, and settled down to her work. Unswerving, she headed straight for the southeast coast and the world beyond. . . .

The days wore on to weeks, full of the important trifles that constitute daily country life. For a time Darbury felt a little flat, lacking in sensation. There seemed to be a dearth of subjects for conversation; and when a parish has nothing to talk about, it is in a bad way. It has to manufacture something.

Mrs. Brent-Hewson came at last to the rescue, by conceiving a passion for drains. She announced herself as convinced of the inadequacy of Darbury's drainage system. This resulted in a mild civil war between the ultra-conservative faction, which could not imagine improvements upon what existed in the days of their great-grandparents, and the ultra-moderns, who labeled every existing thing "wrong" from the Government downward.

Then a fresh period of calm fell upon the land. Miss Brown began a story with a hero whose hair was black instead of the usual golden; and one of Hugh's friends, Tom Westwoods, came for shooting and cubbing. Letters from Barbara were frequent and full of enthusiasm. Croft was evidently fulfilling the part allotted to him to the letter, during the calls at each sight-seeing place; and Hugh felt grateful.

"We don't see much of him," she wrote, "but he arranges for guides so that we miss nothing. He took me down the catacombs at Rome, himself. They were so dark, and horribly full of death. . . . I hated them! But he laughed and would not let me turn back. We went on for miles! I wished you were there, Hughie. . . . One of the mechanics became quite ill, and was left at Rome. . ."

Hugh smiled at this drastic treatment. The restlessness which, to his mind, had seemed but a strange sudden

craving for excitement, would, he hoped, be entirely dispelled.

When letters became more infrequent, owing to distance, wireless messages stated that all was well. . . .

With delightful suddenness a fresh thrill was provided for Darbury by Jenny Grant, a village girl. She had, it was rumored, "got into trouble" with a sailor who had recently been on leave in the neighborhood.

Miss Davies now, of course, came to the fore, being, fortunately, installed at Lake Cottage during Barbara's absence. She arose in her own righteousness to put "the fear of the Lord" into the wretched girl, overlooking the love of Him. Afterward, she hustled her victim away to one of those places known as "Homes," thus saving Darbury from contamination. Mrs. Stockley, with commendable charity, placed a large part of the blame on the girl's mother. The mother had seceded from the church upon the advent of incense soon after Mr. Horne's arrival, and was now known as a "chapel woman"; therefore, of course, she was no favorite with the bishop's descendant. . . .

There is, proverbially, a lull before a storm. Darbury, during those peaceful days of late summer, had no intuition of the most terrible thrill of all, in these days of thrills.

Hugh, especially, was of too bright and wholesome a nature to have misgivings, when the sun shone and all seemed well.

Returning one day with his friend from a morning's cubbing, it was therefore with no sense of impending disaster that he reined up at Lake Cottage and proposed calling. They dismounted, tethering their horses to the gate. A small group of people, talking together near the

main road, turned and cast wondering looks in his direction. Perceiving Miss Horne among them, he waved gaily; then threw away his cigarette, and turned into the short drive.

It was one of those glorious mornings at the end of September in which late summer and early autumn intermingle. A light breeze ruffled the surface of the lake into little waves; waterfowl called to each other in hoarse shrieks; a few snowy swans soared with a rush of wings, and flew off toward the smaller lake on the common. Hugh glanced round with a pleased sense of appreciation.

Then he rang the bell.

The face of old Martha, who opened the door, was red and swollen with weeping. Her limbs trembled, as if from sudden shock.

"Why, Martha!" he exclaimed kindly, "what's the matter?"

For a moment she gazed at him blankly, half in astonishment, half in fear; then, without a word, she burst into hysterical sobs and turned back into the house.

The color ebbed a little from Hugh's face. He looked at his friend in vague apprehension, and they silently followed the woman into the drawing-room. Instead of being bright and fragrant with the flowers Barbara loved about her, it seemed strangely cold, gloomy and deserted.

A chill fell on Hugh.

"Where is Mrs. Stockley?" he asked uneasily.

"Up-stairs," sobbed Martha. She walked to the little bureau and picked up a telegram. Turning slowly, she half held it toward him, and the flimsy paper trembled violently in her hands.

Hugh took the telegram slowly from the woman. For a moment he looked uncertainly at her frightened face,

then round the familiar room, as if dreading to read it. . . . At last, with an obvious effort, he raised the sheet, and turned away. . . .

The telegram fluttered, unheeded, to the floor; and Hugh raised shaking hands to his head, in a vague uncertain manner. He turned slowly, his face ashen, haggard and old all at once. His lips moved a little, but no sound came; he looked at his friend with the bewildered eye of a dumb animal awakening to some terrible pain of which, as yet, it is not wholly conscious.

Tom Westwoods picked up the telegram.

It was from the London agents of Croft's firm. He read the few bald sentences so fraught with tragic meaning. The aeroplane, it stated, in characteristically crude words, was missing. The lifeless body of the mechanic had been found in the water, where, it was feared, the rest had perished. Search was in progress, but with small hope of success. A typhoon had swept across the seas verging upon the Philippine Islands. One wireless message of distress had come from the machine.

Then silence fell.

PART TWO

THE RISING ORCHESTRA

I

Dawn broke at last, the first dull lines of gray merging into a myriad pearly tints. Birds awoke in the forest; rustled amid the leaves; shook their wings; then flew forth to hunt for breakfast: their brilliant plumage reflected the sun's rays in a thousand bright hues as they flashed from beneath the shadowy trees.

Upon the sloping shore of a tiny cove, the waters of the lagoon lapped in a gentle, rippling murmur. Farther away, the surf of the open sea boomed like distant thunder against the barrier reef; waves swirled angrily through the gap which formed an inlet, hurling their vast strength against the high, rock-like walls only to break into fountains of white spray and floating masses of foam; dragged, hissing, back again to prepare for a fresh attack.

Partly telescoped upon a jagged promontory jutting inland from the entrance, rising and falling helplessly at the mercy of the tide foaming through, loomed a mass of something dark. It looked strange, shapeless, forlornly tragic, as if flung down by a ruthless hand and forgotten. Here and there bits of metal sparkled in the sun's gleams.

Upon the ground of the opposite cove, near a heap of

wet coats, little rivulets trickling from her drenched garments, lay the inert form of a girl. A man, likewise sodden from head to foot, knelt beside her, anxiously forcing brandy between her pale lips from a small pocket-flask. Presently he paused, a sudden dread in his heart, and with his head close to her wet blouse, listened. . . . Then, with renewed energy, he set vigorously to work again.

At last she gave a little quivering sigh. Her hands moved gropingly. He tried again to pour a few drops of the fluid between her lips, but she turned her head away with a moan. . . . Soon, with another, longer sigh, she opened her eyes and gazed blankly, as one newly awakened from a troubled dream, into his face. Raising a hand to her head, the vacant gaze changed to one of feeble wonder.

"Why, are you—hurt?" she half whispered.

Until then he had not recognized that the stream trickling down his face was blood. With his fingers he traced what was apparently a long jagged cut stretching from his temple to the left ear: it smarted when touched. Taking the wet handkerchief from his pocket, he sat back and dabbed at it with the clumsy movements of a man unused to troubling over personal injuries. His look was still fixed anxiously upon the girl's face.

As she gazed round the unfamiliar scene, an expression of bewilderment crept into her eyes. Remembrance slowly returning, this merged into concern, then fear. . . . Quickly it grew to terror. . . . Sitting upright, she turned wildly to the man at her side.

"Where are we? where are we?"

"We crashed on that reef," he replied quietly. "The last engine gave out——"

"But—how—did we get here?"

"I found you in the water, and swam in."

Fearfully she looked toward the dark mass, as if measuring mentally the distance from shore, scarcely understanding the full meaning of this feat. Then she looked about her as if seeking somebody . . . finally turned to him, mutely asking the question her trembling lips dared not frame.

He laid a hand upon her shoulder, instinctively fortifying her for the complete realization of the dread that was dawning in her brain.

She caught his arm in a feverish grip, her eyes wild. "Captain Croft—tell me! The others? . . . Where is Aunt Dolly?"

A look, so full of anguish that it seemed as though the soul behind were in the tortures of hell, was her only answer.

She gazed, awestruck, for a breathless moment, at his haggard eyes and drawn blood-stained face, at the features usually so cloaked with reserve now betraying unbearable agony; then, with a hoarse moaning cry, she collapsed in an abandonment of horror at his feet. . . .

For long, long minutes no sound was audible but the thundering surf round what had been the fulfilment of a man's labor, the cherished dream of his ambition, and the lapping wavelets near at hand. . . .

Presently Croft raised his head, and stood up. He gave one long look seaward, to the grave of such unlimited pride and hope; to where, also, those who had risked their lives with him now lay hidden beneath the smiling blue. With a long sigh, he turned away, setting his teeth and squaring his shoulders . . . then looked at the figure lying face downward at his feet.

Women had ever played a small part in his life. Filled to overflowing with travel, engineering, aviation, the war, and, above all, the ambitious dreams of an inventive brain, his thirty odd years had been passed outside the influence of sex. Roughly, he had divided women into two categories—those whom, like Mrs. Field, he could respect intellectually and treat with the frank comradeship of man with man; and those whom he had designated "hysterical females." It is doubtful if any, save his cousin, had received more than a passing thought until she placed Barbara's photograph in his hands and waved her wand. He saw the original, her dawning woman's soul struggling to expand amid a garden half-strangled in the close tendrils of its scentless herbage. . . . And he found her about to be planted in another's garden and surrounded by its little conventional hedge.

Dropping on his knees, he gently raised her, so that she leaned against him.

"Come!" he urged, with forced brightness. "We must buck up, you know, and see what can be done."

She uncovered her white desolate face.

"Tell me—first—what happened," she besought. "It seems like a—a hideous nightmare——" Shuddering violently, she hid her face again.

"We had some engine trouble soon after leaving the Philippines, as you know, which obliged us to return there to land," he replied. "We got caught in the center of a typhoon near the coast, and were driven completely out of our course——"

"It was awful—awful! That terrible, deafening roar!" She began again to tremble violently.

"We were hurled into an air-pocket which caused us to drop nearly a thousand feet," he continued hurriedly.

"That put two more engines out of action and injured the fourth. Only a miracle prevented our being dashed straight into the sea. After a bit I saw land here, and hoped to reach it in time; but she crashed too soon——" He stopped, perceiving the state of her shattered nerves. Standing up, he raised her with him; and she clung convulsively to his arm, every limb shaking as if with ague.

"Something burst?" she said. "I—I saw the mechanic fall! It was the last thing I remember. He—he screamed—— Oh-h!" Her eyes dilated with horrible memories.

"A cylinder blew off one of the starboard engines back toward the fusilage, when we were dropping," explained Croft briefly. Unclasping her hands, he drew her arm through his, turning their steps inland; his own feelings being almost beyond his usual iron control, he spoke roughly:

"For heaven's sake, don't talk or think about it all, just now! We shall go raving mad if we do!"

The words and tone acted as a tonic. Something of her first feeling of inferiority in his presence returned, causing her to struggle fiercely against the weakness that threatened to overcome her.

They walked a little distance in silence. On their right a dense mass of vegetation sloped almost to the water's edge, huge forest trees stretching their branches out over the shingle. On their left rose a rugged hill, jutting into the lagoon between the mainland and the reef, like a mountain spur. Down the valley between, the stream rippled over mossy stones in its narrow bed, sometimes falling in small cascades over uneven ground, to the shore.

"There's generally an opening in a brier reef opposite a fresh-water river," Croft observed.

"Why?" she inquired, without any interest. To talk of anything, however, was better than the silence which encouraged thought.

"It's supposed that the sediment it contains injures the reef-building polypes, preventing their working opposite." He stood and regarded the hill on their left. "The land shelves down precipitately from this hill; which is why the reef is nearer on that far side of its opening. They can't build where the water is too deep."

"Why?" she asked listlessly again, but anxious for him to keep talking.

"Because the polypes can't live and work below a certain depth—about twenty fathoms or so. Awfully interesting, coral! Don't you think so?"

She confessed entire ignorance on the subject. This little digression, however, had served its purpose for them both. Drawing her arm free, she proposed bathing their faces in the cool stream. Revived by this, she became aware of their bedraggled state, of the discomfort of wet clinging garments, and of Croft's ineffectual efforts to staunch the wound on his head.

Shyly she went to him where he knelt upon the bank.

"Let me do that. Shall I?" she asked.

"Don't you mind blood?"

"Of course not!" she answered indignantly.

He handed her the blood-stained wet handkerchief without a word, inclining his head toward her. In a few minutes he rose to his feet, all traces of blood washed away, his head bandaged adroitly with her own handkerchief twisted in his.

"I'm going up that hill, to view the land," he said,

with abrupt decision, proceeding toward it as if oblivious of her presence.

"I'm coming too!" she exclaimed, hastening after him.

"Oh! Why?" he asked, pausing. "It will be a scramble. I shall soon come back."

"I'm not going to be left alone down here! There may be alligators and things!"

He gave an impatient smile. "Come along, then; I'll help you up."

"Oh, no, thanks! I can manage quite well," she replied rather coldly, nettled by his tone and manner.

He said no more, but began to climb the rugged rock-strewn hillside with the agility of a mountain goat.

Barbara struggled after him, slipping, bruising herself, panting for breath. The shock had left her weak and unnerved. She sank upon the ground, drawing hard sobbing breaths. Croft, without a backward glance, was disappearing among the larger boulders at the summit. Fearful of being left, she rose again and scrambled on. Her aching head throbbed wildly now; sudden dizziness caused everything to swim around her. . . . Stumbling over a half-concealed rock, she fell prone upon the ground. . . . There she lay, conscious of a terrible silence. No other sentient being seemed to move within a world so full of awful loneliness that it appalled her: it was almost tangible. A great wave of fear, grief, loss, homesickness, wild—almost child-like—longing for Hugh, swept her away. For the first time since the horror began, she found relief in tears. She lay there alone, sobbing weakly. . . .

From the top of the hill Croft scanned what was visible of the land along the north, east and west coasts. Rising forest ground hid the south from view; but it could not,

he judged, be more than eight or nine miles away. Save for the belt of verdure beyond the stream, and another stretching down to the blue line of the water away to the east, this northern side appeared to be principally barren, with occasional precipitous spurs jutting out to sea, similar to that upon which he stood. This was, he concluded, an island of volcanic origin, with the exceptionally high reef more or less surrounding it, sometimes at a considerable distance from, and sometimes fairly near, the shore.

Down below stretched a wide bay, from which the ground sloped up at a gentle gradient. Between the shore of this bay and the reef not far away the water appeared very shallow, interspersed with peculiar little groups of rocks resembling miniature coral islands. He surveyed this view critically, a purpose forming in his mind.

The gradient inland culminated in a short, fairly steep rise to a grove of cocoa palms, near which a clearing was visible, covered with little groups of something—possibly caves or rocks. Nowhere did there appear to be sign of human life.

It would be easy, he saw, to reach those possible caves by following the neck of high ground running inland from the top of his hill. Turning seaward, he shaded his eyes with his hands and scanned the horizon.

No indication of life was visible. No smoke, no mast, no sail.

He swept the small island with another keen critical glance. From his knowledge of the South Pacific—in which ocean, somewhere, this island must lie—he guessed it to be of little or no use for trade, either in copra or other exports, in spite of its patches of luxuriant verdure.

Therefore, probably, it was never visited by the outside world! Unless there were habitations in the south, it was conceivably uninhabited—possibly unknown.

For some moments he stood motionless, facing these probabilities. . . . Then with grim face, he turned in search of his companion.

Barbara, her head buried in her arms, did not hear his approach. It was with a start of surprise that she found herself suddenly lifted bodily, as if she were but a feather-weight. Feeling again very small and ashamed, she would have struggled free, but his grip tightened.

"Keep still! It's a rough climb." He spoke abruptly, ever his way in moments of stress. The tears of weakness rose again in her eyes. She closed them, but too late to hide what she felt he would despise. She turned her face away into his wet shoulder; and he strode along in silence.

Stray rocks lay about the ridge; small shrubs, interspersed with ferns and club mosses, made progress difficult; but he never paused until they were among the tall trees of the palm grove. Then he set the girl upon her feet.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"Listen!" he commanded, without answering her question.

From near at hand came the noise of rushing water. He turned farther inland, amid tall avenues of bamboo, toward the sound, Barbara closely following. Presently a pleased exclamation escaped his lips, and he halted.

From the high ground the river tumbled down, a sheer waterfall of dancing crystals splashing from great boulders high up among the forest trees to smaller ones on the lower level; thence hurrying and gurgling over little

rocks, which encircled small pools of translucent green, into a clear, softly-flowing stream some six feet deep. This after a time spread out and grew shallow, finally disappearing between rustling walls of bamboo canes toward the cove where it joined the lagoon. From the nature of this deeper stretch of water and the comparative clearing of undergrowth on the banks, Croft judged it to be partly the work of man's hand, not entirely the result of nature. But he forbore to suggest this to the girl.

"An excellent place for bathing!" he remarked. "Can you swim?"

"A little," she replied, with a rush of memories. . . . She turned about, looking up wonderingly at the jungle-like vegetation all around. The avenues of bamboo swayed softly in the gentle breeze; that and the falling water were the only sounds to be heard, beyond the eternal booming of the distant surf.

Croft led the way back to the grove, then on to the clearing beyond.

Suddenly Barbara stood still, with a little cry.

"What's that?"

He stopped, looking aside in the direction indicated. Stooping swiftly, he lifted a queer bleached object and examined it closely. She drew near, glancing curiously at the hideous thing.

"It's a skull! Isn't it?"

"Yes," he replied, "and—of the negroid type!"

She looked up, startled. Until then it had not occurred to her to wonder concerning this island. The past with its tragedy had expunged all else from her mind.

He continued to examine the skull, with puzzled brows.

"There are some curious holes which I can not under-

stand," he said. "They might have been caused by bullets. But it is doubtful if natives would possess bullets here."

"Do you think there are any here now—any natives?"

He met the eyes raised in trepidation to his own. "I can't tell, yet. But they are friendly enough to white people." Throwing away the skull, he went on toward the open space.

The apparent caves proved to be moss-covered ruins of bamboo huts. Many had fallen into rough heaps upon the ground; of others, bits of all remained standing, guarding like sentinels the broken portions resting wearily against their base. Lying about, half-hidden in undergrowth, were oddly-shaped household utensils made of wood or a rough kind of pottery; also large shells, rude cups fashioned from cocoanut-shell, broken spears.

Croft picked up a primitive basin. This, also, he found to be riddled with small holes. . . .

The scene was desolate, giving the impression of Death, of the relentless hand of Time sweeping away to extinction what once had seemed strong and full of life.

"It's quite possible," he said, "that the whole colony which lived here has died out. Populations dwindle very much in the Pacific Islands."

She gave a little shudder.

"It's horrible here—I don't know why! Let's go down to the shore. There seems to be a hut still standing down there." She pointed toward a small structure half-way down the lower slope, sheltered beneath the hill which they had climbed. Croft hurried in its direction.

It consisted of one small room. The bamboo walls were intact, but the thatch forming the roof showed large rents; on the ground within, amid fusty dead leaves, were

scattered utensils similar to those which they had already seen.

Croft glanced round critically, then at the girl, who had followed him, then out through the opening seaward.

"We can make this sufficiently habitable to carry on with," he observed.

His words went out into silence. They brought instantly a vivid realization of the immediate present to her mind, followed quickly by thoughts of the future. A new fear shot up, clutching her heart with a horrible, clammy hand. She looked with sudden dread at her companion's profile; and something about his tense lips seemed to confirm the awful foreboding. The faint color revived in her cheeks by exercise ebbed away, leaving her white. She clenched her teeth and her hands; then, with an effort, put her dread to the test.

"We—shall soon be rescued? Ships are certain to—call here? It will only mean a few hours—or days?"

The moment which Croft had dreaded, yet known to be inevitable, was at hand; and he felt the utter inadequacy of his sex in dealing with delicate situations. Longing vainly for Margaret Field, or some other tactful woman, he continued, under lowered brows, his lips compressed, to gaze at the water sparkling in the sunshine.

From his prolonged silence Barbara guessed the truth of his convictions; words were unnecessary. She clasped her hands in agony, uttering a little moaning cry like some dumb animal receiving its death-wound.

Croft turned quickly. He looked down at the quivering, girlish form, meeting the frightened eyes turned to him, trusting in his judgment and resource. And all at once he realized that, in this ghastly predicament, her very life lay in his hands.

A great thrill shook his entire being, accompanied by a sense of responsibility glorious and yet fearful: like that which a mother must feel when first her child is put into her keeping. The eyes she thought inscrutable softened with unexpected, wonderful tenderness. He leaned forward and took her clasped hands in both of his.

"Don't give up hope," he said earnestly. "It's very doubtful if ships call; but they may pass this way. We will do all we can."

She clung to his hands, breathing hard, seeming to find the old magnetism of his personality draw her up, deriving mental as well as physical support from his grip. Her eyes fixed upon his, as if searching for help. . . .

Suddenly, like a plucky ray of sunshine in a stormy sky, a faint smile flitted tremulously across her pale lips.

"We must—as you said—buck up," she whispered, the trembling words scarcely audible.

II

At mid-day the heat became excessive. Mercilessly the sun, like a quivering mass of molten steel, beat down upon the shore; no breath of wind stirred the hot air; the lagoon, with its almost indigo blue, assumed an oily, sluggish appearance, as if sinking to sleep with the lowering tide.

Within the shade of the angle formed by one side of the hut and the hill behind, Barbara lay inert upon a soft, if simple, couch of sun-dried coats. A vivid spot of color showed on either cheek; her head and throat were burning. Finding that the ground swayed and rolled

like a mountainous sea if she endeavored to rise, she gave up the attempt, and lay motionless, with closed eyes.

Near by were some untouched bananas and a broken cocoanut, the shell of which was filled with water and placed upright between three stones. From within the hut came the noise of splitting sticks, as if somebody were breaking the bamboo canes which, crossed and interlaced, formed its structure.

The girl listened, wondering dully at the endurance of her companion, full of a miserable sense of shame at her own weakness. Without pausing for rest, after fetching their coats and procuring food, he had begun clearing and improving this dreary abode—carrying down broken portions from the ruins above for a door, fetching other canes and palm-leaves for mending the thatched roof.

Presently, hot and disheveled, he appeared. He had shed all his clothes except breeches and shirt, and looked, she thought, strangely in keeping with the scene around them. Hard work, and the concentration of a strong mind upon present necessities, had lessened for the time the mental anguish which she had seen in his face. A suppressed excitement seemed to pervade him: his eyes gleamed in a way she could not understand. This was her first experience of a man whose life had been spent chiefly in wild surroundings, often upon but the fringe of civilization; whose abundant vitality responded to the call of untamed nature in a way that proved he had not been shackled by chains of convention closing around him, fetter by fetter, as the years passed. It needed but a few strokes of the hammer to scatter the frail fetters which, with him, had ever been insecure.

"That's done!" he said briefly. He sat down and proceeded to peel and eat bananas with considerable relish.

"I feel so useless!" she exclaimed miserably. "Such a hindrance instead of a help." Receiving no encouraging contradiction, she continued, with the excitable wretchedness due to racked nerves and rising fever: "It would have been wiser to have left me in the water. You would get on better alone. We shall only die lingering deaths here, if rescue doesn't come."

"Dashed if I mean to die!" he protested, between two large mouthfuls of fruit. "Nor shall you!"

She turned over, fixing unnaturally bright eyes upon him. "But life won't be worth anything here. Just you and I—strangers—on a desert island! It's impossible!"

He made no reply for a moment, only glancing gravely at her feverish face.

"We shan't be strangers for long," he observed.

Throwing away his banana-skins, he rose and surveyed the water; then he came close to her, towering over her, as it seemed to her excited fancy.

"I'm going to try to reach the machine."

She started up in alarm.

"I may be able to rescue our luggage and provisions—"

"Oh! no, no, no!" she cried wildly. "Suppose you get drowned? Never mind luggage! What does that matter? Oh! don't leave me all alone——" Terrified, she tried to reach some part of him, to restrain him by force.

He caught her arms, raising her to her feet and supporting her.

"Listen!" he commanded in a tone which checked her agitation. "It's not only luggage! I want to save the wireless transmitting set——"

"Wireless!" Radiant relief overspread her face.

"Why—then—we can soon get rescued after all? I forgot about that."

"You mustn't rely too much on it. It will be only the short range set. The long range used on board obtained its electrical energy from a generator run from one of the engines, and is therefore useless now."

She reflected for a moment.

"You mean—you don't think this range will reach anybody? How is it worked?"

"From accumulators, which of course won't last long. There's a chance of it reaching a ship somewhere. The Australian Navy would be certain to search when our disappearance became known; but unfortunately we were swept so completely away from our route."

Her eagerness for this new hope to be tested was still modified by fears concerning the risks of his venture. He pointed out the shallowness of the water and the scattered little coral islands. "The tide's low enough now for me to wade to that one nearest the reef. From there it's quite a short distance, if swimming is necessary."

"I will wade with you——"

"The devil you won't!" He suddenly wheeled round upon her. "Look here! You're never to go in the lagoon! Bathe in the river, but don't over go in the lagoon. Swear to me!"

She gazed at him in stupefied amazement and anger.

"Why not? If—if you go in——"

"I—er—I understand these waters. They're treacherous. Promise me——"

"Oh!" she interrupted impatiently, "I don't want to bathe—ever—anywhere! I'll sit and watch you go."

"In this blazing sun? No, indeed! You must lie down in the hut and sleep."

Vainly she remonstrated, fearing a recurrence of the tangible loneliness she had experienced upon the hillside. His jaw set in a way she was to know well. With a vise-like grip he drew her toward the hut.

"It's not safe upon the shore," he said, when, at the entrance, she feebly struggled.

"Not safe! Why?"

"Oh!—this tropical sun. You don't understand it."

Rightly or wrongly, he prevaricated for the second time.

The interior was cleared now of rubbish, and a rough aperture for window had been made at the end facing inland. The shade was cool and welcome. Croft fetched the coats and spread them upon the ground.

"Now," he said, "stay here until I return."

She sank down wearily, without replying. Stooping, he took her wrist, feeling for her pulse.

"You understand? You promise to remain? Or must I barricade the door?"

She pulled her hand away, and let her aching head fall back upon the fleece lining of the coat.

"Oh, don't bully me!" she protested irritably, trying to control the quaver in her voice. "I won't endure it. Please—go."

He looked down at her in silence for a moment, his brows knit in perplexity. Then he turned and went out, setting up the improvised door behind him.

Lying motionless in the comparative gloom, a prey to rising fever, new fears assailed her. She had labeled the situation "impossible." With deeper meaning and the distorted views of imagination, her words recurred to her now. Shrinking in horror, she faced the fact of her isolation. Sundered from all the sure harbors of civiliza-

tion with this man of uncertain moods—a man whom she neither liked nor understood! . . . This—after a life spent in the safety of Darbury!

"A dark horse. You may as well give in at the beginning, for you will eventually." Who had said that? . . . Vividly the scene of Mrs. Field's tennis party rose before her, followed by their first unpleasant encounter near the lake. Scenes at the fête followed quickly—the peculiar, magnetic force which had completely swept her away; the banter, often contempt, she had met in his regard. . . . Then Miss Davies' warnings. . . . The same baffling encounters during the trip, the same strange force, the same contemptuous impatience, the moments of keen, almost boyish exuberance, the hours of impenetrable reserve. . . .

A care for her physical welfare had certainly been shown to-day. But in everything her will had been overpowered, even to the extent of physical force.

"Impossible"? It was not to be borne! What might not happen? . . . The fears, accumulating, grew into feverish terror. She struggled to her feet, and hurled herself weakly at the door, with some frenzied idea of escape. . . .

The door was barricaded on the outside!

As a caged beast, half-mad with terror and impotence, she staggered up and down the little hut, her brow clammy, her clenched hands shaking. . . .With a rush of hysterical tears, she flung herself upon the ground. "Hugh!" she sobbed, distraught. "Oh, Hughie! Hughie!"

Barbara had been used, in a mild way, to ruling Hugh all her life. With his limited range of ideas, his easy good-nature had enjoyed following her lead. Now, wave

after wave of intense, helpless longing for him broke over her heart. Long she lay there, shaken by fear and misery, drawing hard, choking breaths after the relief of tears was denied her. . . .

Gradually, worn out, she grew calmer, her mind reverting to old scenes with Hugh in the days before the troublesome "inner self" had risen to shatter her content. If he had accompanied them, he—not Croft—might be with her now! With the wish she came, as it were, to a full stop. Hugh, with his love of every-day things, of home comforts and friendly pastimes, would seem as much out of place here as amid the rush of city life. Although going at once to his country's aid, he had, she knew, loathed his experiences of the war. The wholesome, customary setting of a "country gentleman" was Hugh's true sphere. . . .

These more peaceful reflections served to quiet yet more the previous turmoil; gradually she lost consciousness of her surroundings, falling into a troubled, restless sleep. . . .

The sun had moved round behind the hill and the hut seemed dark and oppressive when, suddenly, her eyes opened. She started up in some alarm. Surely it was not night, and Croft still absent? Her heart missed a beat, and then hurried on wildly at the thought; she turned cold, then feverishly hot. However autocratic and distasteful any companionship might become, the awfulness of solitude—as for a moment that contingency swept across her mind—made it desirable beyond all riches.

She ran to the door. To her surprise, it was no longer barricaded. She pushed it open, and drew a breath of relief; for outside it was still broad daylight. The sun-

shine gleamed in bright patches upon the shore, alternating with long stretches of shadow cast by palms which, singly or in small clumps, dotted the bay. The time, she judged, must be early evening. If Croft had returned and opened the door, where could he be now?

Unsteadily she walked to the water's edge, searching with straining eyes the shore and the distant reef, without result. Nameless dread at her heart, she turned to ascend the slope toward the palm grove, thinking to get from there a clearer view of the wrecked machine.

The ground was rough: it seemed to rise and push her back, then to fall away into yawning gaps at her feet. Often she stumbled, sometimes fell, pulling herself up again only to stumble blindly once more. At last, panting, she reached the nearest palm of the grove, and leaned against it. The reef swayed before her eyes in a mist; she closed them, pressing her hands to her throbbing head. . . .

A movement behind, among the trees, presently caused her to look round quickly. It was, unmistakably, a footfall: evidently Croft had returned and come to the river. With a sigh of relief, she left the tree and turned inland to greet him. . . .

Then, for a moment, all power seemed to leave her body. She stood rooted to the ground, her lips moving without uttering a sound, her eyes dilated.

About ten feet away, a pair of fierce, restless eyes gazed upon her, fascinated, from a sooty-black face repulsive by its breadth of nose and thickness of lips. The dark, naked form, of medium height and sinewy build, glistened as if fresh from the water: the frizzy black hair clung damply about the ears and forehead. As he stood watching her, like an animal watching its prey,

the coarse lips parted in a slow devilish grin. . . . With a quick stream of unintelligible words, he sprang forward.

The spell broke. With one shriek of terror, she turned and fled madly down the slope.

The unintelligible muttering ceased. A blood-curdling yell like some wild war-cry pierced the still air, echoing around the bay . . . quick agile steps sounded close in her wake.

The unearthly strength born of emergency came to Barbara. Everything save the distant hut faded from her sight; time ceased; coherent thought fled from her. Only one instinct reigned—that of the hunted beast to reach its lair. That, once there, defense might prove equally impossible, she never paused to consider. Over stray rocks and undergrowth, shingle and sand, she dashed, her heart half suffocating her with its beating, her throat so contracted that she could scarcely draw her painful breaths. . . . The bare feet drew nearer in their hot pursuit; the weird cry again and again resounded over the bay. . . . Closer he came: she heard his short snorting breathing . . . closer: the warmth of it fanned her neck . . . closer yet, and a hand caught roughly at the sleeve of her blouse, tearing the soft silk to ribbons as she wrenched her arm free . . . closer, and this time the sinewy black fingers grabbed the bare arm itself. . . .

A swift whirling noise smote across her reeling brain; something hurtled past her shoulder . . . with a savage snarling groan, her captor fell sprawling upon the ground.

Dazedly she looked around. Springing over crags, scrambling through brushwood, Croft came down the hill behind the hut at break-neck speed. The native, quickly regaining his feet, cast one glance toward the tall white figure with blazing eyes, dropping, to his muddled senses,

direct from the heavens; then, without a word, he turned swiftly and leapt, with extraordinary rapidity, back toward the palm grove.

Her transient strength oozing away, Barbara staggered forward.

Croft caught her by the arms.

"What the devil made you leave the hut?" he demanded angrily.

All tendency to faint left her. No lash of a whip could so have quickened her bewildered brain. She recoiled in his grasp, gazing up into his face dumfounded. Amid the confusion of her mind his extreme pallor struck her forcibly. His eyes pierced her like flaming steel.

"Hadn't you enough sense to realize this possibility?"

Now was the time to assert herself. She hesitated; searched vainly for a retort; opened her mouth; closed it again. In her weak state circumstances proved too overwhelming. Feeling utterly insignificant, she merely turned her miserable eyes seaward.

"I—was only looking—for you," she murmured unsteadily.

Opposition may wear down a man, as a fortress, with time; but helplessness silences all guns. He stood, breathing hard, still grasping her arm, gazing into her face with eyes no longer flashing with anger, but smoldering with something she could not define—something composed of horror and fear.

"God!" he muttered at last, in a different tone. "If I had been too late!"

Noticing the red marks upon the soft white skin of the arm he held, he pulled her a little closer and examined them.

"Your arm is bruised?"

"Yes," she replied laconically. "And," with sudden deliberation, "you are making it worse!"

If she expected apologies she was disappointed. His grip loosened: dropped to her hand, and drew it close within his arm. For a moment he stood silent, scanning the vicinity of the palm grove: perceiving no signs of the native, he turned with her toward the hut.

"I rescued most of the wireless and luggage," he said, turning the subject of her thoughts abruptly. "I brought some of our things across, and left the rest on the reef. You were asleep. So I took the wireless up the hill, and fixed up the aërial."

This whirlwind expedition staggered the girl, used to Hugh's leisurely ways.

"When I woke up and could not see you anywhere——"

"If you had looked behind the hut you would have found the luggage, and could have guessed what I was doing," he remarked.

Not possessing the nature of a detective, she had private doubts upon that score, but forbore to express them. Sinking once more upon the coats, she watched him carry in their suit-cases and—something else.

It was the old tin box of Aunt Dolly's provisions. . . . Tears rose to Barbara's eyes, and her throat contracted: but her companion's presence caused her to wrestle valiantly with the grief stirred up afresh by the sight of this familiar old box. The little homely things are ever those which bring out the full force of loss or tragedy. Where mansions and riches fail, a dented little thimble, seen often upon a loved one's finger, will tear at the heartstrings of those who find it idle and forgotten—pathetic in its proof of death's ruthless division.

Hiding weakness from Croft's eyes, however, was

becoming, unconsciously, Barbara's purpose in life just now. Any display of it was, she felt intuitively, abhorrent to him. In silence she watched him unfasten the box, take out the spirit-lamp, search among the other contents, and abstract a tin of milk.

"Did you——" she spoke at last, with difficulty, "find any—did you see——?"

"Nobody," he replied briefly, with an understanding for which she was grateful. She closed her aching eyes, listening abstractedly to his movements and the hissing of the little lamp. Presently he brought some steaming milk in a small tin mug. She had often used that mug upon picnics with Aunt Dolly; the sight of it caused another wave of homesickness and loss.

"I can't drink it," she muttered, turning away.

"You must," he replied quietly, seating himself on the ground beside her, his countenance inexorable. She took no notice.

"Come along! Don't be silly, Barbara!"

Quickly she turned and faced him.

Then rather too hastily she took the mug; but her hands trembled, and the milk splashed over the edge. He placed his fingers over hers and guided them; and the cool firm touch brought a peculiar sense of calm and security.

"It tasted—queer!" she remarked.

Rising, he returned to the work of unfastening their luggage.

"Your case is unstrapped," he said presently. "Will you unpack it now?"

"Oh!—I can't! Not yet," she said wearily.

"Shall I?"

"*No!* Oh, dear me, no!" She started up in alarm.

"Well, but—don't you want things for the night?"

"No."

He looked at her in mute inquiry.

"You don't suppose," she asked with asperity, "I shall ever—*undress* in this place?"

As he turned away, she saw the same flash of white teeth in the dim light that she had seen the first time they met.

"I advise you to change, after such a soaking," was his only remark. He stood near the door, as if uncertain, for a few moments, then pushed it open. "I shall have my supper outside. . . . Good night!" he added.

She was conscious of immense relief; for the problem of the night had been causing her some private anxiety since darkness fell. He had solved it with characteristic brevity.

There was much sense in his advice: her clothes felt stiff and heavy. Wearily she opened her suit-case, surprised to find most of the contents dry. She hastily undressed, and slipped into cool fresh garments. Throwing on a loose Japanese dressing-gown, she lay down again, exhausted. A strange overpowering heaviness enveloped her senses, deadening her limbs, forcing down her eyelids. Had a complete tribe of natives been heard approaching, she would have been powerless to shake off the numbing drowsiness. All fears sank into oblivion. . . . She fell into a deep heavy sleep.

III

The flare of many torches illuminated the midnight darkness in the south of the island. Chimabahoi, the old chief, sat in the leafy council chamber near the entrance of the sacred palm grove, surrounded by his

trusted warriors. In the center of the large circle of squatting figures stood Babooma—next in rank to the chief—recounting, in his muttering, sing-song dialect, the strange story which, arousing tragic memories, caused consternation and foreboding in every heart.

When he ceased, Chimabahoi sat silent, pulling his beard with wrinkled dark hands that trembled. An agitated babel broke out all around, fierce native oaths blending with wails of distress.

The chief at last commanded silence, and spoke.

"Whence came they, Babooma? Was there no strange canoe floating, like a vast island, upon the lagoon?"

"There was not, O Chief. The white woman appeared in my path as if sprung from the waving palm! The white man"—he looked furtively round—"did fall from the skies, sending his bolt before him!" He shivered, stroking his sore shoulder. "The great white man is a giant, O my Chief! His stride is swift as the flight of a bird; the flash of his eyes like the lightning which strikes our trees! He will not easily be killed."

A recurrence of the terror which had sent him speeding through the woods without pause made him glance again toward the darkness beyond the circle, as though half expecting to see some superhuman phenomena appear among the waving tree-ferns.

"How great is the tribe? Didst thou not see others, Babooma?"

"None other did I stay to see, O Chief! Perchance they are evil spirits come to haunt the huts where live the ghosts of our slain ones. Or perchance they slay with ball-devils like unto those other evil ones."

Murmurs of fear and anger rippled round the group: the black faces, lit up by the flaring torches, were savage

in their primitive, untamed emotions. Mingled with the fury of revived memories was the superstitious dread of the supernatural in which they had been bred. To them everything strange, which they could not understand, savored of evil powers against which their daily life was pitted. This, with the practise of *tabu* partly consequent upon it, constituted their religion. Even the image representing some benignant deity upon their island needed constant propitiation.

The chief sat in deep thought for some moments; then rose and waved his spear.

"The Vow!" he cried. "Let preparations be made, my warriors. When next darkness hides the earth, we will fall upon this white tribe, true to the Vow!"

He had struck the right note to swing the balance in favor of anger. Their fear melted into the old longing for revenge. An uproar of shouts greeted his words.

He turned to Babooma. "Before dawn, Babooma, thou shalt go with me to the distant shore—thou and Roowa, there to learn more of their numbers, and devise the best means of attack."

A confusion of voices resounded, accompanied by many furtive glances into the darkness of the forest; the savage joy of revenge was yet tempered with awe. Memories of the means of warfare adopted by white men caused them to follow their chief in still half-fearful excitement to the sacred palm grove.

Presently the sound of native voices rose once more, singing their *Song of Hate.*

. . . . . .

On the northern shore a cool breeze stirred the plumed tops of the palms, wafting the fragrance of the myriad plants and trees of the forest in a subtle perfume over the bay.

The man sitting outside the little hut raised his face, inhaling the soft scents, grateful for the refreshing wind. All night he had sat motionless, head hidden in his hands, There was nobody to see, in his haggard features, what Barbara had seen that morning.

It is during the long hours of the night, or in the early dawn, between the unconsciousness of sleep and the renewal of bodily activities, that troubles assume their grimmest aspect—their edges, blunted by familiarity, having worn acute again while the mind rests.

Although his eyes had not closed, this solitary vigil, with its forced inaction, had revived and intensified the morning's sufferings. The sense of powerlessness which had attacked Barbara with such violence in the afternoon now attacked him. For the first time in his life the self-confidence, bordering upon arrogance, which had carried him from success to success, was shaken; for the first time he was confronted with failure—not the failure of his own resource; but the failure of a human atom pitted against all the overwhelming odds of nature, caught in the remorseless wheels of fate. Not only had they ground him in their merciless revolutions, dashing him aside, bereft of success when it was in his very grasp, scattered the labor and ambitions of years to the winds; but others, whose lives were temporarily in his keeping, had been ground down, too. Again and again he strove to turn his thoughts from the wrecked mass out there upon the reef; from the dark waters and the monsters which infested them, where those friends, strong and full of life not many hours ago, now lay hidden. What awful fate, worse than mere drowning, had been theirs? . . . He strove to restrain his mental agony, dragging his mind away, for down that road madness lay. . . There were

natives, possibly cannibals, upon this island, to be faced sooner or later. Therein, to his mind, lay hope. For surely they were in touch with civilization? During his travels he had encountered many of a similar type to the one who had appeared to-day, and found them more or less friendly. He had also picked up a good number of dialects employed among Polynesian and Melanesian natives. With luck he might find means of rescue through their enterprise, if they had any. But this was doubtful. He knew well the characteristics of the Pacific: knew the trade routes, the ports of call, the features of islands in touch with civilization, the features of many practically unknown. . . . Intercourse with strange natives, too, meant considerable risk, with a woman in his care. . . . At that thought, the same strange thrill shot through his frame which he had experienced in the morning; the awful loneliness of spirit seemed to fall from him.

Scattering his reflections, a strangled, terrified cry came from the hut. He sat up, alert in a moment. All had been quiet hitherto. The draught dropped into the milk had done its work. He had been fortunate in rescuing the case of medicines and first-aid necessities from the machine. Again, louder, another cry smote upon his ears. He sprang to his feet. . . .

Reaction had come upon Barbara, awakening from the heavy effect of the drug, so vividly that she was almost delirious. The little hut seemed to swing round and round, now darting suddenly up toward the sky, now dropping, as a stone, into limitless space. And ever, from the four quarters of the globe, roared what seemed like ten thousand trains. . . . To escape was impossible, for somebody had barricaded the door . . . the hut rushed down now toward the dark fathomless

waters . . . they closed above her head, and everywhere black hands surrounded her—black leering faces came close. . . . With a shriek of terror she cowered against the wall, when the door opened; then, perceiving freedom, she ran blindly toward the starlight without.

A pair of arms caught her upon the threshold. Half-demented, she struggled in their hold, gasping hard sobs. But they closed more tightly; and their protective warmth shut out the lurking dangers. Gradually she grew calmer; the nightmare sensations of returning consciousness abated. Ceasing to struggle, she leaned exhausted against him, her arms clinging to one of his, the waves of her long hair falling across his breast.

So for several minutes they remained—two derelict beings hurled, helpless pawns, over the boundary line of civilized life into a world yet in its infancy—each conscious of a sense of comfort in the other's nearness.

The stars, peering through, caught a glimpse of the man's eyes, seeing in them a look which no human being had ever yet seen there. Only they knew that the hand, half-hidden in the girl's dark hair, trembled a little.

Presently he straightened himself. With two fingers he felt her brow and cheek: they were of little more than normal heat. He stroked back the hair clustering over her forehead; and she stirred, raising her head.

"You must lie down again and sleep," he said, drawing her toward the bed of coats. But her grasp tightened upon his arm.

"You are not going—far away? It—it's like a vault in here—full of death——" Her voice rose unnaturally.

For a moment he hesitated; then, kneeling down, he rearranged the tossed coats with his free hand, and drew her forcibly down upon them.

"I won't leave you at all," he said hurriedly, but with

a decision which obviously relieved her. "It's not safe—for either of us—alone—to-night."

Her eyes wandered over his face, in the dim starlight, in a dazed manner, while she sank back upon the coats with a long sighing breath.

One hand still clasped in hers, the other arm passed under her head for a pillow, he remained upon the ground by her side. The turmoil of his own spirit seemed unaccountably soothed. Though never sleeping, a comforting drowsy numbness replaced the sharp suffering of his mind. . . .

But when the early light of dawn pierced through the aperture, it brought with it the remembrance of a man's hand-clasp, the trust in one honest brown eye, the shade in place of the other. . . . The wonderful peace which seemed to have descended upon the little hut, lulling his mind, filling it, during those hours of close protection and companionship, with something exquisitely beautiful, albeit incomprehensible, was shattered at one blow.

He half-withdrew his arm; then, pausing, bent over the sleeping girl and looked long upon the delicate features, the sensitive lips and dark lashes. As he looked, an unbidden thought flitted across his mind, bringing a slow flush into his face. Had another taken indisputable possession? Had he reached to the very depths of her soul; fired all the deepest fibers of her womanhood? . . .

He drew himself up, gently freeing his hand and arm. That question opened vistas down which he refused to look. A part of his nature that night had been illuminated as if by many-hued candles; and he felt dazzled, strange to himself, almost, for once, afraid.

He rose with difficulty, his limbs cramped after long sitting; stretched his arms; looked down once more upon the sleeping form confiding in his protection.

Croft was a lover of cleanliness, fair play, victory always—but victory with honor. Throwing back his head in a characteristic way, his eyes still resting upon the sleeping face, he smiled. It was the little smile which many men knew well, which enemies feared, but which those he led had ever loved to see: that smile with him meant a challenge, and a challenge presaging achievement.

Noiselessly, he opened the door and went out. Seizing two old basins discovered among the rubbish in the hut, he strode toward the river.

Save for the distant surf, no sound was audible. Every bird and tree seemed abnormally still; the eastern sky showed a faint opal, as if pale gray smoke veiled subtle delicacies of mauve and rose. From the palm grove he keenly surveyed the bay: it was deserted; the world might have been dead. Plunging through the tall bamboo he came out upon the deepened stretch of water glimmering faintly, like moving darkness, below him. Then, throwing off his garments, he dived into the shadowy ripples, feeling a primitive delight in the cold sting to his tired limbs. For a few minutes he swam, with strong strokes, up-stream; then, returning, scrambled out, shook himself and rolled on the moss to dry, keenly enjoying the play of the soft air upon his skin. Afterward, slipping into his shirt and breeches, he filled his basins and returned to the grove.

When he emerged from the bamboo, the sound of voices fell upon his ears. Hastily stepping back, he waited, listening intently. The voices came nearer, then receded toward the seaward outskirts of the palm grove. Croft took a few noiseless strides in their direction, soon discovering the dark forms of three natives among the trees. Soundlessly creeping in their wake, he hid again,

close enough to hear their speech, while they paused at the top of the slope.

He could see now, in the stronger light, that all were armed with long spears, two also carrying bows and arrows. The third, an old man, wore round his neck a large clam-shell disk—emblem of the rank of chief—and through his nose-cartilage a dark stone. Rings, probably of tortoise-shell, hung from his ears.

Croft wondered if this were a visit of negotiation, with a view to a compact of friendship with visitors to their island. He recognized them for members of the huge scattered family of Melanesians, or Papuans, which have some undoubted connection with the African blacks, and are to be found in numberless South Sea islands as well as in Melanesia proper. Although their dialect is more or less local, there is sufficient similarity to make it fairly intelligible to any one accustomed to the variations.

A few minutes, and Croft's illusion of a friendly compact was destroyed. Hostility was evident. He soon realized that an attack was being organized for the following night, though he could not distinguish the plans being laid.

Emboldened by the absence of any sign of their enemy, the men remained standing for several minutes, gazing down the slope at the solitary hut wherein Barbara lay unprotected. At last, after an indistinct colloquy, they moved slowly forward in its direction.

For a moment Croft's heart seemed to stop beating. To expose himself, unarmed, would mean certain death, and the consequent abandonment of the girl, whose life now rested upon his, to a fate probably far worse. Inside the hut, if he could but reach it, lay the suit-case containing his revolver. Should he risk all and dash from his hiding-place, or——? A sigh of relief escaped his

lips when the men suddenly halted. For what seemed an eternity he watched them confer together, evidently divided in opinion on the wisdom of their venture. When at last they turned and made off toward the south of the island, he found his clenched hands were shaking and his brow was wet. With a half-laugh, he rubbed off the perspiration, wondering vaguely why the mere sense of protection should have roused so unusual an emotion, so deadly a fear, during but a few minutes of uncertainty. Danger did not usually have such an effect. Then he hurried down to the hut, where he found a white-faced girl ineffectually barricading the door with suit-cases.

She uttered a welcoming cry on his appearance at the window.

"How did you escape? Where were you? What can we do?"

To his own amazement perhaps as much as hers, he laughed—almost happily.

"They have gone away," he replied. "We can't do anything at present."

She gazed at him in some bewilderment, knowing nothing of the reaction which had caused that strange light in his face; and he laughed again, boyishly; then leaned farther in for a closer inspection of the blue-clad figure with its cloud of hair.

"You are better?" he asked.

The paleness of her cheeks changed suddenly to red under his scrutiny.

"I—I'm all right," she muttered, turning away.

"I will go back for the water," he remarked; and his face disappeared from the aperture.

Barbara's mind was uncomfortably confused. Safe in some refuge, she had seemed to be sleeping for hours. When she awoke she instinctively sought for a hand

which proved not to be there. Throughout the terrified moments that ensued, vague impressions of some midnight event chased elusively through her brain. They were intensified by Croft's appearance. Vainly she tried to capture the threads; to separate the real from the chaos of delirium. All was confusion, jumbled repetitions of accumulated horrors. She caught first at one thread; then lost it and caught at another. But ever at one point her cheeks burned. How much was true? Surely not——. The more she thought, the more convinced did she become of its incredible reality. . . . How could she face her companion? He alone could place the unraveled threads in her hands. But how to make him do so? How——

So engrossed were her thoughts that she started violently at the sound of his voice again at the window.

"Your nerves are awfully weak," he remarked.

"They are not!" she snapped indignantly. Was she always to feel foolish and, above all, appear so, with this man?

Opening the door, she took in one of the basins, without looking up. He drew out his own suit-case.

"I'm going to shave, outside."

"*Shave?*" Had he suggested drowning she would have been less astonished, in the circumstances.

"Yes. Why not? I'm not partial to a beard."

She gave a fleeting glance at his chin with the growth of forty-eight hours' scrub, then at the bedraggled bandage round his head.

"Yes," he said again. "You must attend to that presently. But let's have breakfast first. Get it ready when you have finished washing."

Feeling like some paid "help" receiving orders, she withdrew into the hut.

A scented steaming bath could not have been more welcome than that little basin of cold water. The freshness invigorated her, reviving a girlish interest in appearances. Unpacking a tiny traveling mirror, she proceeded to do up her hair, dressing in one of the cool washing frocks intended for Australia.

Croft was thumping on the hut, demanding breakfast, before the completion of this toilet. His quick glance took in her dainty and very civilized appearance down to the gray suède shoes; but he made no comment.

Again the contents of the old tin box proved invaluable, with the addition of bananas and cocoanut. They spread their store upon the ground outside, in the early morning sunshine.

"We must go slow with these things," he remarked, mixing a second mugful of *café-au-lait* from one of Aunt Dolly's tins, "and live upon the fruits of the earth. Can you cook?"

"I cooked at a Red Cross hospital during the war."

"Good! From what I have seen of the island, there will be plenty of fruit, birds and fish. Things might be worse."

From her expression, this was doubtful. Conversation languished. Croft seemed abstracted, deep in thought. Her riddle of the night lay unsolved. . . . .

After several furtive glances at his face, she made a plunge.

"I want to know——"

"Yes? what?" Quickly his eyes searched her own, causing her to lower them confusedly.

"I can't remember what happened—I'm afraid I—did I behave rather stupidly, last night?"

He stretched out his hand for a banana, peeling it with irritating deliberation before replying.

"You were, naturally, slightly unhinged after all your experiences."

This guarded reply was unsatisfactory.

"But I'm afraid I—what really happened?"

"Nothing to bother about."

She felt exasperated. Looking across at him, she fancied the suspicion of a smile hovered around his lips.

"You realize, of course, that anything I did—or said—was because—I mean, it was not my normal state!"

"Oh, I quite realize that!" His tone caused her to look up quickly again.

"Why are you laughing?" she asked uneasily.

"Why are you so afraid?" he retorted.

Nonplussed, she took refuge in a dignified silence. Finishing her breakfast, she looked round the bay—at the rugged hill beside them, the palms and dense forest trees in the background, the coral shingle and white sand stretching down to the magnificent blue of the lagoon, in the distance the reef and vast stretch of limitless sea: the intensely vivid colors and contrast shone in the sunlight with extraordinary brilliance.

"It's all very beautiful," she said at last, conversationally.

"It is!" he agreed warmly, rising to his feet. Bringing his mug filled with water, he sat down close beside her.

"Now, please mend my head."

This slight wound, it must be confessed, was receiving far more consideration by its owner than many far worse received during the war. The touch of her light fingers about his head was an exquisite novelty. He sat with a docile patience which would have astonished past nurses who had been reduced to exasperation.

Barbara was concerned over his pallor and the lines surrounding his eyes.

"You look worn out!" she exclaimed involuntarily. "Didn't you sleep well last night?"

"Not a wink!" He glanced quickly up at her. Whereupon her unraveled confusion returned fourfold; and she finished her job in silence.

"I'm going up the hill to the wireless," he observed then. "You need not fear the natives. They won't return until they have mustered their numbers."

At her look of alarm he continued hurriedly: "I've got a scheme for scaring them off altogether. I shan't be long away. If you shout, I shall hear."

There was no suggestion of her company being required. She watched him disappear, with a sickening sense of the oppressive loneliness that she dreaded; but pride forbade her uttering a word to detain him. When he was out of sight, she looked drearily round the bay, the distractions of the morning ceasing to occupy her mind. Then, with unconscious imitation of Croft, she threw her head a little back; clenched her hands; and entered the hut. . . .

While the natives hurried to the south, to prepare for battle, the man sat on the ground beside the transmitter, staring out to sea, his brain working on the scheme to which he had just alluded; his mind torn between conflicting decisions. Twice he turned, preparatory to sending out messages; and twice he refrained. In this predicament, at the mercy of a tribe of hostile savages, there were but two forlorn hopes of defense. One lay in the little weapon down in the hut, with its limited supply of ammunition; the other in the inherent superstition of the islanders. If once the latter could be roused; if his

ruse, for all its wildness, succeeded, their lives might yet be safe. On the other hand, wireless messages might reach a ship in time. There was not enough electrical energy for both purposes. . . . Which should it be?

"My God!" he muttered to himself. "Was ever a man in such a damned position?"

IV

No better tonic could have been given to Craft's mind than this necessity for immediate action. Until he had made his decision and the details were matured, he forbore to alarm Barbara with the prospect before them.

For about two hours he was absent. Then a spiral of gray smoke ascended from the hilltop, and he appeared with his arms full of wire.

"I have left a beacon burning, in case a passing vessel——" Abruptly he ceased, standing still, his eyes upon the figure emerging from the hut.

"A transformation!" he exclaimed; and there was a strange new tone in his voice.

The dainty shoes and stockings had been discarded, the hairpins thrown away. With a long thick plait swinging down her back, sleeves rolled up, bare feet sinking in the sand, she flashed him a shy look of inquiry.

"It seems more natural—here," she said.

Thus did Barbara take the first step from out the net of lifelong conventions, and tread the free spaciousness beyond. It was a significant turning-point in her existence; therefore happened unconsciously. For it is seldom, in the seemingly trivial events of a day, that one recognizes a sign-post stretching arms of direction down unexpected roads, which may dwindle to mere tracks

ending in stagnant pools, or broaden into wide thoroughfares leading up to undreamed-of heights.

"You fit in so well—as if it is your natural sphere!" she added.

He smiled half to himself. Laying his burden upon the ground, he noticed some white lacy objects fluttering upon a rock close by.

"What's this?" he asked curiously, fingering one. "How pretty! Is this what you call a——"

"Camisole. It's mine," she said, grabbing it.

"I didn't mistake it for mine," he observed dryly.

She sat down upon the white objects, like a hen upon its chickens, tucking them under her. "Some of the things in my case got wet," she explained. "I was drying them in the sun." With an adroit movement, she twisted round, gathered them up in one heap, and vanished into the hut.

Amusement softening the lines of weariness on his face, he sat on the vacated rock. When she reappeared, he patted the spare seat beside him. Rather wonderingly she approached, looking, he thought with compunction, extremely young and delicately made. To inform a sensitive girl of the forthcoming attack of possible cannibals was, to Croft, ten times more formidable than meeting them single-handed. He was not versed in the handling of these situations. Perhaps, with the peculiar influence his personality exercised upon her, physically as well as mentally, he acted in the best way possible.

Taking her hand, he drew her down close beside him; then, in a few curt sentences, he told her.

The fingers he held closed convulsively upon his own; her free hand clenched itself upon her knee; the faint color drained away, leaving her face quite white.

"Can't we go—hide somewhere—on the reef?" she urged, turning dark eyes of fear upon him.

He shook his head. Very thoughtfully, from every point of view, had he considered the position. To begin with, he had no idea of the size of the tribe. And should they, by hiding, elude the natives to-night, it would be but a respite. The same danger would surround them every moment they spent here; they could never know peace or safety. For some reason these natives were hostile: something must be done to overcome their hostility. Until and unless a friendly compact could be made, they must be forced to leave the two white people alone, through fear. All this he explained to the girl, who recognized the wisdom of it, as well as what she deemed the impossibility.

"Two! Against, possibly, hundreds! How *can* we make them fear us?" she asked hopelessly.

"Through their superstition," he replied promptly. "Once make them believe we deal with the supernatural, or possess magical powers, and they will make us *tabu*. The dread of death or disease from violating a *tabu* will cause them to shun us like lepers."

Barbara, inexperienced in natives' ways, was only half convinced. It seemed too childish to be credible, in men so fierce of aspect. She listened incredulously to the scheme he propounded, her knowledge of electricity being limited.

"I will get some sticks," he concluded, rising; "and place everything in readiness; then I shall turn in for a bit. This afternoon we'll strengthen the walls of the hut; and I'll put up a partition. Then we shall each have a room until we can build another hut. Plenty of work before us, if rescue doesn't come soon!"

"Yes," she replied disinterestedly. Being convinced of death lurking at their elbow, ready to approach with the darkness, plans for the future seemed superfluous. Silently, she helped to collect sticks, an extraordinary numbness pervading her mind. Croft's spirits rose. He had faced and eluded death too often to fear it. His confidence in this simple ruse puzzled her.

Collecting the rubber shock absorber belonging to the wireless outfit, he broke the sticks into short stakes, showing Barbara how to cover them. This done, he proceeded to fix them firmly in the ground round the hut, then attached the aërial to the top of each: thus forming a wire circle a few inches above the ground, as far from the hut as the amount of aërial permitted. The two ends were carried through the entrance and connected to the transmitter within.

"Now!" he exclaimed, "when I wave, press the key on the transmitter here, and watch the result."

He went out to the wire; and, kneeling down, placed one hand about half-an-inch above it. Raising the other, he gave the signal.

She pressed the key as directed. Immediately, a series of bright blue sparks flashed, like fireflies, from the wire to his hand, which he repeatedly jerked away; then, delighted with its success, he returned to her.

"You see," he explained, "the volume of current is always large with wireless, therefore takes effect by sparking at the moment of contact. The human body is, of course, a conductor. If you gingerly pat the wire, the sparking effect is increased; if, on the other hand, you hold on to it, the sparking ceases, but the current runs through you to earth. In either case, therefore, our visitors will get the shock of their lives—especially as

they usually approach any object of attack by waddling along on their stomachs!"

He chuckled with the anticipatory enjoyment of a schoolboy over a practical joke; then suggested having some food.

Mechanically she fetched Aunt Dolly's box and drew out tins of beef and coffee, heroically trying to share in his confidence.

"To-morrow," he said, watching her closely, "when these fellows are settled, we must make a raid for food. You must learn to cook breadfruit, Barbara, and *taro* if there is any here. I will show you how to make *poi*, which the natives of Hawaii eat."

"What's that?"

"A kind of paste made from fish and the root of *taro*."

He talked on, compelling her to attend, diverting her thoughts until the meal ended, covertly watching her every expression. Then he drew her within the hut, to rest.

"I can't sleep," she objected, faltering a little.

"I can—for hours!" he replied cheerfully. "At any rate, you must stay inside, out of the heat."

Mechanically again, she entered, going to the little window and looking out, drearily, toward the palms. He fixed up the door, then came over to her.

"You don't feel at all nervous?" he asked nonchalantly.

She turned, with a forced smile.

"Oh, no! . . . Dear me, no! . . . Of course not," she answered, with terrific emphasis.

His lips twitched ever so slightly.

"That's all right! You're a plucky soul for a girl!"

She flashed an indignant look at him, which, in spite of herself, faded as she met the unexpected laughter in his eyes.

"You wanted adventure!" he reminded her. "You wanted to 'feel life,' to learn the 'meaning' of things, to sound the 'deep chords.' Well! You have your heart's desire—at the very bedrock of nature! Seize it, Barbara! Drink to the very dregs! Then tell me if you have discovered what—is missing."

Surprised, she listened silently. He turned away, laid one of their coats just inside the door, and threw himself down upon it. Within a few minutes he was sleeping the sleep of sheer exhaustion.

But the girl sat for long under the little window, lost in thought, wondering over his words. And ever her mind reverted to one sentence. A few words of praise from one whose opinion you have unconsciously learned to respect, and what a world of courage do they bring in their train!

. . . . . .

There are no pleasant hours of twilight in the tropics. The sun sets, and soon the world is wrapped in darkness. It had disappeared behind the west hill, and already a few stars were showing in the swiftly darkening sky, when Croft came out of the hut to where Barbara was collecting the remains of their supper. He carried something in his hands.

"Do you understand a revolver?" he inquired.

She turned round, mingled fear and relief in her face. "Have you one? No; I have never fired one in my life; I wouldn't dare! Why didn't you tell me you had one?"

"Well—I wouldn't use it save to frighten them, except in a last extremity; these fellows don't understand gunpowder."

She glanced up in quick appreciation of a sporting sense of fair play.

"But what about the holes in the skull? You don't think they do, by any chance, use firearms?"

"No; or they would have been armed with them this morning. They poison their weapons by thrusting the points into decomposing bodies, I expect. It is possible that other white people have been here some time; we must find that out. . . . But I want to show you how to use this little beast, in case anything goes wrong and you are left——"

She laughed, miserably.

"If they manage to kill you, they will soon finish me off!"

He regarded her in silence, for a moment.

"They wouldn't kill you," he said quietly. "Do you understand my meaning?"

Her face went very white. For a few minutes she paced up and down, hands clenched, facing this new terror, striving to control herself before this man whose very look discouraged weakness. The coolness of his bearing, as he stood playing with the weapon in his hands, calmed her, bracing her to a simulation of the same fearlessness.

"Show me," she said, going to him.

Quietly, as if explaining the mechanism of a watch, he explained how it worked.

"I will load it, and fix it ready for use," he concluded.

And the girl who, in England, had shrunk from all firearms, took the little weapon from him eagerly, welcoming it as a valued friend bringing, possibly, the greatest succor of all. . . .

Their previous dangers had been thrust upon them with the suddenness of a thunderbolt: there had been no torture of passive anticipation.

As they sat in the dark hut, upon their upturned suitcases, near the window-aperture, the strain upon Barbara's nerves became almost unbearable. Her imagination ran riot, painting the coming scene in lurid colors. With every minute her faith in the electric ruse, never strong, grew weaker; until it ebbed away, leaving only a ghastly death, or worse, creeping nearer with the rising of every star. . . . She faced the moment when, her companion slain, she would seize the revolver, turn the dark muzzle to her fluttering heart, place her finger on the trigger. . . . She might fail! Wounded, helpless, she would feel the clutch of dark sinewy hands. . . . Feverishly starting forward, she dragged her mind away to thoughts of other things: clung in desperation to remembrance of Hugh. Old scenes of their childhood rose before her—their games together, their rides, his bright kindliness and never-failing good-nature, his hatred of discomfort. She could but acknowledge to her inmost heart—where the truth alone finds admittance—that his presence, much as she longed for it, would not have inspired the confidence she needed at the moment. Hugh's courage was all right; but his appetite for adventures was small, and his initiative powers were no greater.

That realization gave her an uncomfortable stab of compunction, opening up avenues of reflections down which she hesitated to look. . . . Her mind returned, with added dread, to that which faced her—nearer now. . . . She clasped and unclasped her clammy hands, sitting upright; then crouching back against the bamboo. . . . Only fear of disgrace in her companion's opinion restrained her wild impulse to rise and flee somewhere—anywhere—to escape this fearful ordeal. Had Croft

touched her or spoken, her control would have snapped altogether. But he sat perfectly still, his gaze fixed upon the dark slope down which their enemies would come, his mind apparently oblivious to all else.

The silence was deathly. Not a breath of air stirred the tops of the palms; scarcely a sound came from the smooth surface of the water. . . . It became intolerable, almost tangible. She longed madly to break it, but dared not. . . . Appealingly, she fixed her eyes on her companion's dim profile, marveling at his perfect composure, noting the air of courage and vitality in every fiber of his frame. . . . As she watched him, her fevered brain seemed gradually to grow calm, her faith in his confidence and ingenuity to strengthen. . . . The strain relaxed. Hope struggled feebly within her heart. She no longer felt the wild desire to scream or to escape. Her clenched hands parted, and she sat back with a sigh.

"That's all right!" Croft's gaze came down unexpectedly from the horizon to her face in the dim starlight.

"What d'you mean?" she whispered back.

He leaned toward her, and she felt his hand within her arm. "Come closer. You had a rotten attack of nerve-sickness, didn't you? These boxes lack the comfort of armchairs. Lean against me—that's better."

Quite naturally, she obeyed. As she felt her arm close in his, his shoulder brushing her cheek, a sense of comparative safety seemed to envelop her: all at once she felt very tired.

Those who, from lack of imagination and its sense of fear, face a terrible ordeal with gallantry, are justly called brave; but those who, tortured by these possessions, foreseeing all with shrinking dread, yet meet it with no outward flinch, deserve the laurels of heroism. Some

such thoughts flitted through Croft's mind, as he sat waiting, fully conscious of the suffering silently endured by his companion. When she relaxed against his shoulder, he drew a breath of relief. . . .

What seemed like hours passed in the silence and darkness. Then Barbara suddenly raised her head.

"Have I been asleep?" she whispered, in astonishment.

He turned to answer, whipping suddenly back to the aperture, and craning forward. A sound had reached his intent ears—the faint distant crepitation of snapping twigs.

Now that the dreaded moment had arrived, Barbara was conscious of an utter lack of agitation. Save that her fingers closed upon his arm, she gave no sign: her eyes followed his, peering into the starlit dusk without.

For several minutes nothing more was heard. The girl was beginning to think it had been a false alarm, when all at once a slight rubbing noise reached them, as of something wriggling over rough ground. At the same instant a dark form was dimly discernible flitting, shadow-like, from a distant tree to the shelter of a large rock, there falling to the earth. Presently, from behind this rock, issued a little, snaky, black stream—three or four bodies waddling along on their fronts, their outline faintly distinguishable.

Minutely sweeping the whole visible horizon with his keen eyes, Croft now perceived other black streams, issuing from other temporary shelters, slowly trickling down the slope. . . . He leaned back.

"They are crawling along upon their stomachs, as I predicted, to avoid detection," he whispered.

She also leaned forward, watching the black streams converge, gradually merging into one which rolled on-

ward like a dark tide, heaving and subsiding as the waves of a midnight sea. Soon it came sufficiently near for separate forms to be distinguished. The starlight feebly illuminated the white sharks' teeth in the crossed wooden swords which some carried, glimmering faintly among the chains of shells and stones decking the arms and necks of others.

Presently, two or three figures detached themselves from this moving mass and wriggled forward with incredible swiftness, leaving the remainder some yards behind.

"Scouts!" whispered Croft.

Barbara caught her breath sharply, drawing back into the hut.

Croft, his eyes fixed upon the advancing figures, laid his hand upon the transmitter, with forefinger outstretched toward the little key upon which so much depended. No sign of the wire encircling the hut was visible in the comparative gloom.

A few tense moments . . . then he pressed the key, keeping it down, giving the spark-gap a slight adjustment.

A few more snake-like undulations . . . the silence of the night was rent by a hideous yell of pain and terror. . . . Another followed, then another, in quick succession, blood-curdling in their ferocity. The advancing forms leapt like lightning to their feet. Dropping their spears, without pausing to investigate this phenomenon, they fled madly back to the main party, rubbing their chests, stomachs, or arms, babbling incoherently.

Croft released the key, and sat back.

"Couldn't have been better!" he whispered exultingly. "Look! they are having a pow-wow."

The small army had halted, huddled together, still lying close to the ground; and it was evident that a consultation was in progress. After a short time, encouraged probably by the silence in the hut, another plan of attack was apparently decided upon.

Quickly and silently, the little rivers divided again, one advancing toward the east of the hut, one toward the west, evidently with the intention of surrounding it. As all was carried out by means of the same wriggling tactics, this took considerable time.

Croft was soon satisfied that the numbers were small, the encircling lines being only one or two deep. Groping through the entrance of the bamboo partition, erected that afternoon, he watched from the doorway that part of the circle form up. Satisfied that it was at an even distance from the hut, and, therefore, the wire, he returned to his post.

At some invisible signal, the members of the black circle started, as one man, to waddle forward, before making their usual wild dash when close to their prey.

Croft bided his time, until they were within a few feet of the wire. Then, again, he pressed the key and waited. . . .

Barbara, beside him, closed her hand over the revolver, deadly calm.

They had not long to wait.

From the seaward end of the hut, the same blood-curdling cry of terror suddenly smote upon their ears. It was quickly repeated from the eastern side. . . . Then, from all around, rose a deafening medley of howls and frenzied yells, partly of pain but more often of fear, as the advancing men came in contact with the wire, seeing the wicked blue sparks hiss at their bare flesh,

feeling the sharp sting of the electricity. Those who escaped it were equally terrified, and the whole order broke up. Some rolled upon the ground rubbing themselves, still howling; others fled, screaming, toward the south. A few, braver, tried again to reach their goal; and again retreated, half petrified with fear of the unnatural.

Croft waited until but a few stragglers remained near the hut.

"Now," he cried, "we must show ourselves, and complete the illusion!"

"Oh!" remonstrated Barbara, "is that necessary?"

"Yes; if it's to be a success."

Seizing her arm, he dragged upon the door, and whirled her round to the landward-end.

Those natives who remained uttered loud, fearful shouts, at sight of the two white figures; falling upon their faces, they stretched out arms of supplication, gabbling what seemed to Barbara unintelligible nonsense. Those fleeing turned, halted, then likewise fell upon their faces, terrified at these apparitions in the starlight.

For a moment the girl thought her companion had lost his senses. Loosing her arm, he sprang forward with a bound, his arms wildly waving. Appearing unnaturally tall, his white shirt and bandaged head increasing the supernatural effect in eyes used only to a dark naked skin, he went through a pantomime of weird gestures. Now and then this was interspersed with extraordinary utterances snarled from between gleaming teeth and cruel, drawn-back lips. The wild awful fury, seeming to emanate from every pore, terrified her: he looked every inch a savage himself. His weird babble bore strong resemblance to that of her pursuer. Apparently the

prostrate natives understood at least part of the discourse; for occasionally eager hands were raised in supplication, accompanied by cries or moaning replies. . . .

The scene was the strangest ever witnessed by a conventionally-reared English girl. That one man could so influence an overwhelming force of armed savages, and look so devilishly inhuman, she would never have believed possible.

Suddenly, as if at some command, the groveling wretches scrambled to their feet. With another torrent of wild words, he wheeled round, and, to her amazement, threw his arms around her, pressing her close. . . . What seemed, in the excitement of the moment, like a cloud of smoke, together with a sharp explosion, momentarily dazed her senses. . . .

She felt herself lifted bodily, whirled back again round the hut and in at the entrance; while, from without, arose a fresh confusion of howling cries, with the tread of running feet, as the warriors, terrified by the magnified effect of the revolver-shot in the dusk, dashed for their lives away up the slope. . . .

Once inside, he leaned back against the bamboo, still holding her close, his breath coming fast, every nerve tingling, primitive man among primitive men, after the savage state into which he had worked himself.

"Well done!" he panted, laughing wildly. "The revolver—just then—was an inspiration! Vanishing in a puff of smoke finished the trick!"

Barbara gasped, too much astonished to realize that she was still clasped in his arms, having forgotten the existence of the revolver during the last scene. It hung from her hand, still smoking a little from its accidental discharge.

"W-what—were—you doing?" she stammered.

Again he laughed wildly. "Telling them we were sent here by their gods, and should blast the island into a thousand bits if they showed us hostility! You saw the effect?"

"I did, indeed!" Realizing their position, she tried to free herself, but his arms tightened.

"Among natives," he continued, excitedly, "a wife is *tabu* to her husband. To—to make you doubly safe, I told them you were my—my wife."

"Your——" Words failed her. More vehemently she struggled, suddenly afraid of him, of his savage grip, and of the eyes which glittered strangely in the semi-darkness.

But ordinary shackles of restraint had fallen from Croft for the moment. Since those wonderful hours of the night before, the girl had assumed a new prominence in his mind. He had become acutely aware of her, as he had never yet been aware of any woman. It was all strange, bewildering. His senses had been stirred, primitive emotions inflamed by the crowded events of the past hours: the savage, hidden in every human being, set free, by force of circumstances, to grapple with the savage always free among the men whom he had to subordinate. Life or death, man and woman, savage, primitive passions pitted against savage, primitive passions. . . . No drawing-room code of morals or manners was guiding their destinies out here.

He laughed again, pressing her fiercely up against his chest. "So—while we are here, you are mine! Don't forget. You may belong to another in England; but here, you—you are mine!"

His tone was exultant, and he bent her backward so

that her face was upturned, unprotected beneath his own. His breath came hot and fast above her lips.

Some primeval, caged-beast instinct seized her, too, sweeping away fear. Raising her free hand, she dealt him, with sudden passion of rage, a blow in the face while struggling violently in his grasp.

His arms loosed her so abruptly that she nearly fell. For a moment he stood before her, his hands groping at his head, looking dazed, or as if awakening after some vivid dream. She confronted him with the fury of a little wildcat.

"You are mad! Mad! I—oh—I *hate* you!"

Covering her face with both hands, she strove to subdue the extraordinary tumult within her . . . then looked up at the sound of the door being hastily shut with a crash of bamboo canes.

With a gasp of relief, she realized that she was alone.

V

After those two days and nights, crowded with such tense emotions and desperate hazards, with death lurking round the corner, it seemed to Barbara that she had lived upon the island for months. The tragedy resulting in their arrival became less poignant, more remote. The immediate present and possible future, with almost frantic desire for rescue, occupied her mind, together with an enhanced, purely physical exhilaration in being yet alive.

After the natives' attack, a new phase began between the pair. Paradoxical though it may sound, the hours which brought them so near together widened the gulf between them. Had that eventful night ended with the accidental discharge of the revolver, their daily life might

have continued more or less placidly, like the waters of some river, with but an occasional rock obstructing its even course. But Croft's amazing lack of self-control had been like a huge stone hurled violently into the center of the river, causing ever-widening circles to extend. Intensified a hundredfold, all the fears of her first afternoon upon the island rushed riotously back. She became conscious of him as she had never been before: not only of the force of his will, but of the strength of the passions lying dormant under a cold exterior. All Miss Davies' hints and warnings returned to her mind. She became uncomfortably aware that there might be truth in them; and this reflection produced a bleak sense of desolation, of lack of protection, which turned her cold.

Nothing more had been said concerning the episode. Half expecting some kind of apology, she had decided, next morning, to accept it frigidly, drawing close the cloak of her own reserve and dignity.

But the apology never came. He did not appear at all until nearly midday, when he arrived with arms full of fresh fruit. Then it was he who seemed encased in a mantle of such icy reserve that her own attempts dwindled to mere foolishness. She took refuge in silence. A stone wall and ten miles of land might have divided them. He spent the afternoon fetching things over from the reef, leaving her severely alone.

It was not until the evening that a small chink showed in this mutually-erected wall. She sat listlessly watching the birds flitting across the bay; while Croft, just outside the hut, rummaged among the contents of a newly-salved box, scattering ties and collars broadcast. Suddenly he paused.

"By jove!" he exclaimed. . . . "Thank God!" he

added, so fervently that she turned quickly, hope, for she knew not what, shooting across her heart.

"A tin of tobacco!" Exultantly he waved it aloft.

"Oh!" Mingled disappointment, annoyance and impatience in her tone, she sank back.

"You don't smoke?" he inquired politely.

"Cigarettes—sometimes." A vivid memory of Hugh with his perpetual cigarette, and of their clandestine smokes together from childhood, stabbed her with sudden intolerable pain. She rolled over, hiding her face in her arms. "Don't—remind me!" she muttered brokenly.

He looked down at the crumpled figure, his brows knit, mute pain in the eyes which had seemed so stony all day, his lips tightly pressed together; then he turned away abruptly and opened his precious discovery. . . . But no familiar aroma of tobacco arose near the hut that evening to increase the torture of her mind. Instead, he vanished again, after a strained frugal supper. . . .

This position endured for some days. He seemed to keep away as much as possible, and her loneliness became at times intolerable. But she learned many practical things. He taught her to create fire by friction with wood; to bake breadfruit—that substitute for a cereal in the South Seas—in hot embers, then scoop out the interior; or preserve it by drying thin slices in the sun. She soon acquired primitive ways of preparing, with a camp-fire and a few old native vessels, the strange fish, birds and the fruits he brought.

Then, one day, he came striding down the slope, after being absent for hours, looking strangely haggard round the eyes. With disconcerting suddenness, in characteristic, brief sentences, he demanded, more than suggested, friendship between them.

"We can't go on . . . this life's unbearable. . . ." His voice was unusually curt, the sentences were disjointed, his nerves evidently worn thin.

She was taken unawares, at a moment of deep depression, when everything seemed very dark. Not pausing to reflect on the possibility of similar suffering having impelled this request from one unaccustomed to beg, she shrank back, her fears and suspicions crowding in.

"I'm afraid I can't trust your—friendship. I can't forget——"

He looked at her queerly, with eyes that flashed in sudden anger.

"Damn it all! That was an exceptional night. Can't you *understand?*"

But years of Puritan surroundings are not wiped out in less than a week.

"I'm afraid not. I——"

"Then you must lump it!" He turned away with an expressive shrug, and disappeared up the hill.

That was the only overture he ever made; and the strain between them increased.

Yet, to Barbara, the conquest of difficulties and acquirement of fresh knowledge each day, with the delight accompanying any successful ingenuity, became both interesting and engrossing. She welcomed anything which made work to absorb her thoughts. For the terrible feeling of impotence, the sheer homesickness, the loneliness, were ever below the surface, ready, all together or individually, to spring upon her at any moment. They attacked her unexpectedly, dragging her down into an outer darkness, shattering her courage, preying upon her nerves. . . .

A day arrived on which the onsets came "not singly

but in battalions." She had been alone for hours. When Croft arrived, her spirits were below zero, her nerves frayed, her temper was not of the best. He glanced at her shrewdly, but appeared to notice nothing. Coming to the hut, he dropped a large cocoanut into her lap, where she sat outside the door.

"There you are, my child! Get busy!" he remarked casually.

Uncontrollable irritation, the result of solitary fretting, welled up within her. Impulsively she seized the cocoanut and hurled it down the beach. "Don't call me that! I'm not your 'child'—nor anything to do with you."

There was a moment's silence; then he gave a little laugh.

"No, indeed! Let's thank the good Lord for that, at all events."

She looked up, dumfounded; but he had turned away into the hut.

So that was the position? Her dislike was returned in full? A sharp stab of hurt pride and desolation caused sudden tears to rise and roll down her cheeks. She scrambled to her feet and, out of sight among the brushwood, lay down and sobbed out her heart.

Croft got his own supper that night. He made no comment on her swollen eyes and lack of appetite. But when she took the large shells used for plates to wash in the lagoon, he rose, impulsively, to follow her. After a few steps, however, he paused uncertainly. With a little helpless shrug, he returned to the hut. Sitting outside, he filled his pipe thoughtfully, his eyes never moving from the forlorn figure down by the water's edge. . . .

Each day he spent much time upon the reef, salving all

that was possible of the machine, until what remained was swept away one night by the tide. Thus vanished the last tangible link with all the old life of ambition. A beautiful bubble, his dream of achievement had burst around his head, leaving him stranded—not merely back at the beginning once more, with the possibility of further efforts, but back at the beginning of all creation, cut adrift from all fresh endeavors, from the schemes he contemplated, the conquests he had predicted. . . .

A dozen times a day, one or both climbed the hill and vainly searched the horizon—gathering, with dwindling hopes, more fuel to heap upon the growing pile which some day might flare into a beacon to attract a passing vessel.

The natives seldom ventured far from their settlement. Whenever Croft encountered one, the frightened wretch took to his heels. Only once did he meet one with sufficient courage to reply to the white man's questions. But, at the first allusion to ships and other white men, his fortitude gave completely away; with a wailing cry of fear, he turned and vanished among the trees, leaving Croft no wiser. . . .

Hope may be the indispensable good fairy of life, but she is an elusive one. She flits round; touches us with a dainty untrustworthy hand; and then, when we reach out to seize her, presto! she is a thousand yards away again. Thus did she treat these two. But ever her touch grew lighter; until, as the days merged into weeks, they ceased to feel it. Each wrestled, separately and unaided, with the enemy, despair. . . .

Barbara was haunted by thoughts of Hugh's suffering. To be alive, in splendid health, yet unable to inform those mourning her death, could be equaled only by a like

impotence upon the other side of the grave to allay the sufferings of those beloved upon earth. After a lifetime, too, of inseparable companionship, this new existence, in which Hugh had no part, seemed strangely incomplete. Yet, paradoxically again, his presence was not needed here: he would have seemed as much out of place as the proverbial fish out of water.

Croft, on the other hand, appeared daily more suited to his environment, fitting in as if it were indeed his "natural sphere." And daily he became more of an enigma; therefore, naturally, grew to occupy a more prominent position in her thoughts. Gradually, as the past grew fainter, her confidence returned. His apparent disinclination for her company, though reassuring in one way, piqued her in another. If she went with him on expeditions for food, it was not at his suggestion; and conversation languished. So she withdrew into her own shell; and the invisible wall grew higher between them, only occasional chinks appearing, or thin places through which they came a little nearer. At these times the girl regretted her refusal of his one friendly overture. . . .

His mind, she supposed, was passing through the same torments as her own, with the same alternating moods. For the first time she began to turn the leaves of that engrossing book, Human Nature. That realization brought to her, being a woman, the quick instinct to help to hold out the olive-branch. But whenever the olive-branch was offered, he seemed not to require it—in fact, longer and more frequent did his absences become. . . . She grew to look for his coming, to bring interest of some sort into the dreariness of her life.

It was one evening, two or three weeks after the natives' attack, that the largest chink in the wall appeared.

The day had been unusually hot; and she strolled listlessly up to the river to bathe. A cool breeze now stirred the palm-tops, rustling among the bamboo canes, so that she approached unheard. With bare sunburned feet, and the revolver—without which she seldom stirred—stuck in her belt, she passed through the grove, through the tall dark avenues beyond, to the clearing by the water's edge. There she halted, amazed.

Face downward lay Croft, his dark head buried in his arms; beside him were one or two branches of bananas; a couple of breadfruit had rolled, unnoticed, a few yards away.

Strangely embarrassed, Barbara hesitated, uncertain whether to go or stay. She was in the act of turning away, when he lifted his head and saw her.

For a moment both were silent. In his face was the look she had seen there on the morning after the wreck. He rose to his feet; and, conquering her embarrassment, she went toward him.

"What is it?" she asked earnestly.

He looked down into the misty blue eyes raised, full of shy sympathy, to his face.

"What is it?" he repeated. "Hell! That's what it is." He stooped to pick up the fruit. "What are you doing here? Going to bathe?"

"I was," she replied, hesitatingly. "But—don't go. Can't we sit down and talk? It—it's so lonely."

Again he looked down into her eyes, almost hungrily. Nothing she could have said could have hit the mark with surer aim. But he clenched his hands and put them behind him.

"Are you lonely? I'm sorry. I wish—you had your friends here. If Rochdale——"

"Oh!" she interrupted, "I didn't mean that. Hugh would be wretched here. I mean you—and—me——" She paused, finding expression difficult with this uncompromising lack of assistance. Then she gave a quick look at his gloomy face, threw pride to the winds, and plunged with her old impulsiveness.

"Can't we be—friends?" she asked.

He remained silent, with hands still clasped at his back, watching her curiously.

"I thought you did not wish it," he remarked at last.

She sat down upon a rock, abstractedly picking out bits of the moss which covered it.

"I—I've—forgotten that——" She paused, flushing. "If—we shared our thoughts more, things might not seem quite so bad," she suggested.

The ghost of a smile moved his lips.

"I'm afraid that's—impossible."

"Why?" She looked up, startled and hurt.

"Because my thoughts are not yours. Not at all what you imagine!"

The reflections produced by this cryptic reply apparently amused him, for he smiled again. Then he sat down on the ground near her feet.

"You shall have more company soon. We are going to visit the natives!"

Her face was eloquent with horror and amazement.

"W-why?"

"For two reasons. We *must* inspect the coast to the south, to make sure no boats come there——"

"But you inquired of the man you met in the woods one day——"

"I know. He seemed intelligent, but the bare mention of boats nearly gave him a fit. I met him again to-day, and sent a message to the chief."

"About what?"

"To come to see me and be prepared to conduct us back to their settlement."

Barbara gasped. This audacity seemed like deliberately placing one's hand in the lion's mouth.

"What's the other reason?"

"To make friends."

"Friends! Those savages——!"

"It's necessary. They leave us alone now through fear, which probably won't last. They will hate what they fear; and in time only the hate may remain. That's not the right keynote for a happy life here; is it?" He looked quietly up at her, with a smile full of hidden meaning.

"No." She flushed a little; then gave a dreary laugh. "But I can't imagine what could be, in these circumstances."

"Can't you?" He looked away at the water tumbling over the huge boulders, catching here and there flashes of sunlight through the network of branches overhead. "You were going to find out all about that, in crowded cities; weren't you?"

"About what?"

"What the keynote is which you have found missing to the vast harmony of creation."

She glanced at him in pleased surprise.

"How nicely you express it! I never realized it so clearly as that; it was all vague. Yes. I suppose that is what I felt. It's strange, but I haven't felt it so much, here."

He looked up quickly, a light she could not fathom in his eyes. "Really?"

"Yes. Really! Although we are even further away from life than at Darbury!"

"Indeed we're not!" he retorted. "We are considerably nearer. This is real life, not merely the surface layer. Wait until you visit the natives; then you won't say we are far away. You will find, there, other little notes right at the opposite end of the octave to those of the twentieth century which we have left—untouched by any of our religion and education; but perhaps not differing much! If you stripped away the veneer of civilization, and brought everybody here, you might find that human nature has not advanced so greatly during the centuries, in spite of its advantages!"

Barbara sat watching the light smoldering in his eyes as he spoke. Being used to an environment where little besides surface matters engrossed people's thoughts and constituted their intercourse, she found this man's unexpected dives into the heart of things extraordinarily attractive.

"Do you regard life as a harmony?" she asked, after a pause, with sudden desire for deeper intimacy.

He threw a stone into the river, watching the ever-widening circles it produced.

"Surely!" he replied. "On a large scale, in which each smallest note plays a part, every discord is of value, and—chief of all—in which each note has unlimited effect upon every other note! If the treble doesn't understand the bass, it doesn't follow that the bass is not needed."

"Ah!" exclaimed the girl eagerly, "that's why the melody is often lost—lack of understanding! I see what you mean. It's a lovely idea. Nature is the big harmony; isn't she? But the human notes often mar it instead of—of—what do I want to say?—completing it. Don't they? You know those lines of Dryden's—

> 'Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
> The diapason closing full in Man'?

"And the keynote is—what?"

He smiled at her eagerness. "That is what you must discover and tell me," he said, getting to his feet.

"Here?"

"Why not?"

She watched him collect his fruit.

"Have you found it?" she asked boldly.

He looked at her for a moment thoughtfully; then answered, guardedly: "I know what it is. And I have only fully realized its necessity since—coming here! We all use substitutes out in the world. It has a lot of branches—or, rather, sub-keys. I think my cousin, Madge Field, is the only person I know who possesses it in its entirety. Perhaps," he continued ruminatingly, "few people ever truly discover it; or we shouldn't, as you say, mar the harmony. . . . Well, Barbara, have your dip."

He was about to turn away; but, acting upon some impulse, paused behind her.

"Is it all very dreary for you—here? Do you hate it so much?"

There was a wonderful, unusual gentleness in his voice—an undercurrent of something, almost yearning, which touched her unaccountably.

"It's no worse for me than for you," she replied, responding to his tone in the natural generosity of her heart. He made no reply for a moment. Then, lightly, he pressed her shoulder with his hand.

"Come and tell me when the loneliness is too bad."

And he was gone, his footsteps dying away upon the loose twigs of bamboo cane.

She sat pondering over his words, wondering why he made no decisive response to her overture of friendship. Yet he proved, by the very tone of his voice, a care for

her welfare which, had she realized it, went far to mitigate the losses she had sustained.

She undressed and stood, fair and slim as Psyche, beside the water, a fresh interest awakened in her companion. As she lowered herself into the shimmering ripples, she resolved to follow up this talk, to press through this thin piece of wall; and, by a process of subtle siege, win the friendship which all at once seemed extremely desirable. Mrs. Field's words upon this very subject recurred to her mind. Little as she understood him, she began vaguely to realize the truth in the remark.

But, as usual, disappointment met her efforts when next she assailed the wall. The gap proved to be firmly patched up, even barred across. It was impregnable. Baffled, she could only finger the bars and wonder. . .

"We will build a new hut!" he exclaimed, with his usual quick decision, the surface layer of practical interests effectually stifling all else. "It will at least give us occupation."

The gathering and interlacing of bamboo, with all the necessary arranging and planning, forthwith engrossed most of their time. Barbara became, to her own surprise, greatly interested. The companionship necessarily produced, though far removed from the deeper intimacy which those occasional, illuminating flashes had caused her to desire, was unexpectedly delightful after weeks of loneliness and strain. While they worked together, Croft told her much concerning the Pacific islands, and the natives' customs and superstitions.

The old chief appeared, keeping a safe distance, soon after receiving the white man's message. But an outbreak of sickness was raging in the settlement; therefore, much to the girl's relief, their visit was postponed. Having ascertained from him that no trade was carried on

with other islands, that no ships came to the south, Croft threw himself with renewed zest into the building of the hut. As if to drown all thought, he worked incessantly, sometimes moodily silent, sometimes seeming keenly to enjoy the new comradeship that had established itself, little by little, between them. A month or more passed before the native chief's wrinkled black face appeared again, two warriors in attendance. To Barbara, this insistence upon visiting the settlement seemed too risky to be quite sane. Croft laughed at her remonstrances.

"I told you why it is necessary," he said. "Besides, it will open up a new world of interest. Above all, it's such an adventure! Do try to remember that, *once*, you craved for 'adventure'!"

He laughed again at her expression; and she smiled the kind of smile one gives upon a Channel steamer with a "swell" underneath.

"I don't want to become soup!" she replied, tucking his revolver into her belt.

He thrust a hand through her arm, when they joined the natives; and again she was conscious of the old magnetic stimulation of his personality, which had sustained her during the first terrible nights and days.

While she walked along, listening to their occasional extraordinary utterances, she wondered much concerning his changes of demeanor. Again it was he who engrossed her mind, albeit unconsciously, to the extinction of dangers ahead—as he had engrossed it during the past weeks; helping her, by a counter-irritant, to get through their dreariness.

In her new study of the book of Human Nature she had many pages yet to turn.

VI

Fear and curiosity formed the chief elements of the unusual animation in the natives' settlement. Great bustle of preparation was in progress—spearing of fish, gathering of fruit, by men; while the smoke of many fires, ascending into the still air, indicated the occupation of the women.

Had not the chief ordered unlimited feasting to pacify the stomachs, music to delight the senses of the Terrible Ones? Balhuaka, the stone god, looked incongruous among garlands of trailing vine and the feathery leaves of tree-ferns. Before him stood the sacrificial table—a massive tree-trunk stripped of its bark, upon which was piled a heap of dried sticks and undergrowth.

Balhuaka ever demanded a sacrifice at the full moon, and the moon was now at the full; and the people trembled, for the selection had been reserved for the Great White Chief, and who could tell what ruthless cruelties he might not exact?

Meamaa sat by her sick child and wept. This was the first fresh case of illness since the recent epidemic, and already threatening murmurs had arisen: the small tribe could not risk another outbreak. People shunned her hut, although it was not yet proclaimed *tabu*. She knew well what was in their minds. With no superficial civilization causing them to hide their natural instinct of self-protection, they openly hailed this possible substitute for an offering. Some of her friends even taunted her with their hopes, if she appeared outside.

"A-aa! a-aa! Weep, Meamaa! The little one is with thee for the day; but, a-aa! with the setting of the sun he shall become as the smoke curling up to the nostrils of the Great White Chief! Weep, Meamaa!"

Yet she was one of themselves, and the child a favorite. She thought none the worse of them: they knew not the art of wearing double-faced masks.

Meanwhile, the dreaded visitors were being escorted with some dignity through the intricacies of the thick inland vegetation. Although obviously terrified, the old chief bore himself well, maintaining a natural dignity with his humility.

The scenery was wildly beautiful. Huge trees cooled and shaded the air with their spreading foliage, orchids and poinsettias abounded, and everywhere ferns rioted.

At midday they halted in a glade for food. The two guards speedily vanished; but the old chief sat down a short distance away, refusing all offers of lunch.

"Tabu! tabu!" he muttered, eying their food with regret and tapping his black stomach as if to show that refreshment would be welcome.

Croft remembered many of the laws governing that strange superstitious practise upon which their own safety largely depended.

"We being *tabu,*" he explained to Barbara, "our food and everything we touch is infected; therefore not to be touched by anybody else for fear of instant death! Rather convenient, when one is hungry."

Chimabahoi, emboldened by the friendly overture, put into words a question which had long troubled him.

"Where dwell thy tribe, O Mighty Chief?" he inquired, with some trepidation. "No white warriors were visible around thy dwelling upon the coral shore. Do they, perchance, live in the rocks, or in holes deep within the earth?"

For a moment the other was mystified. Then, remembering the natives' tribal instinct, he seized this advantage

and stood up, waving his arms as if to include the universe.

"My tribe," he explained equivocally, "is ever present; it ever surrounds us! Armed and ready at any moment to come to our aid, it waits, though invisible to mortal eye. Earthly habitation is not necessary for the White Chief's warriors."

The old native glanced about uneasily, a look of alarm overspreading his face. Barbara, not understanding their words, watched him; then caught the dancing imp in Alan's eye and hastily hid her own face for a moment. His sense of drama rising with the situation, Alan stretched out a regal hand.

"Peace, O Chief! Have no fear! They will not touch thee without my command." Then, sitting down, he took this opportunity of furthering his own designs.

"I and my tribe would be friendly to thee and thine. Why hast thou been hostile unto us? Why hast thou so tempted the wrath of the gods who sent us hither, by greeting us with spear and arrow?"

Chimabahoi beat his breast, looking fearfully at Croft.

"It was the Vow," he said in a low tone.

"The Vow? What vow?"

"The Vow of Vengeance—of Hate!" The old man rose, and walked to and fro, feverishly pulling his beard, obviously laboring under some strong emotion. At last he paused opposite them, and they saw tears upon his wrinkled black cheeks. "Hearken, Great Chief!" he said. "The white man came before, not many summers past. He came in great numbers, and he kill! A-aa! He let loose his magic, and he kill most of my tribe with his smoke! It hit them, making holes, leaving little hard ball-devils behind. Our homes were near thine own,

even in the huts beside the waving palms. They also were shattered by the smoke and its ball-devils. My warriors lay dead, bleeding on the ground. Our women also, our little ones, they spared not!" He paused, overcome, for a moment.

Croft sat listening intently, with dawning comprehension.

"How did they come?" he asked.

"The lagoon was black with strange canoes, Great Chief. Beyond, near the big gap in the reef, floated an island. . . . A-aa! a strange sight, filling the bravest with fear——" He stopped, again overcome, and turned away.

Hastily Croft interpreted this conversation to the girl.

"Didst thou attack these white men first?" he asked.

The old man shook his head. "We feared their arrival! We but gathered together, outside our houses, to see the wondrous sight. The hand of Death has been heavy upon us, and we were small in number, even then. That day, less than half were left alive. . . . My sons were all slain. . . ."

"The damned murderers!"

Chimabahoi looked up, startled by this burst of vehement English. Croft controlled his indignation, making further inquiries, which elicited the answers he expected.

"They were all men," the native told him. "After they had killed, they fled away to their canoes. They were covered with dark clothing, each like unto each. When they spoke, they spoke strangely—here," he stroked his throat, "and their words were like the sounds made by one whose stomach is too full, and who must return somewhat lying therein."

This vivid description of the Teutonic tongue convinced his listener.

"Ha! The damned Huns! I thought as much." He again interpreted for the girl at his side. "Now let me think. We must turn this to our advantage. It proves what we talked about that evening by the river; doesn't it? The effects of our 'civilized' war were felt even here!" He ran his fingers through his hair, watching Chimabahoi thoughtfully.

"And thy Vow was of vengeance upon *all* white men?"

"Even so, Great Chief."

"H'm! . . ." His fertile brain speedily conceived a plan which, if wild, was yet founded on fact. For the prestige of his country this account of the war to a people ignorant of other lands and their politics could not have been in better hands. He had been right through it himself and was no sentimentalist.

"Chief," he began confidently, "those white men who murdered thy sons were an enemy tribe waging war against my tribe. And their ways were treacherous, their weapons terrible!"

Chimabahoi was unusually intelligent for a native. Quick to grasp the meaning of this stranger, who spoke a dialect so much resembling his own, a flash of comprehension leapt into his eyes.

"And they came hither thinking to find thee here, Great Chief, so that they might slay thee?"

A smile lit up Croft's face. If not strictly accurate, this surmise would suit his purpose admirably.

"Even so! And, seeing thy tribe of a different hue, they were filled with fear and cried, saying, 'Let us slay them!' "—he had a vague impression of biblical eloquence, but it translated very well—"And they slew all thy sons in their fear; then ran to their boats. For their hearts are as the fermented breadfruit long stored in a pit."

Pausing to refresh his oratory, he proceeded to picture

their mutual enemy in lurid colors, assuring the chief of their downfall. This gave him another inspiration.

"The gods sent us hither to tell thee that thy Vow of Vengeance had already overtaken the tribe;" he announced coolly. "But, because thou camest against us, we could not carry out our mission. The gods were angered, therefore, and visited thy tribe with sickness. Thou hadst to learn the fear of us and our wrath. For, behold! when I and my tribe make war, we do so in fearsome and mysterious ways. When the evil white men pitted their strength against mine, I met them not upon the ground with spear and shield; but in the air!" He waved familiarly toward the strip of sky visible above the trees. "Away among the clouds I hid, sailing across the blue heavens to hurl my weapons at the enemy, while he searched for me upon thy land. . . . . Therefore, Chief, see that thou and thine fall not again into sin by lifting thy hands against us, the friends of all the gods!"

This flow of eloquence made a tremendous impression upon Chimabahoi. His relief was intense. That this godlike pair, with their wonderful powers, had come upon a mission of peace and friendship, inspired visions of renewed prosperity in his simple mind. Coming closer, he prostrated himself at their feet, in submission.

To Croft the sight of this gray-haired man groveling before him was pitiful. But for the sake of their safety he continued to play his part, accepting the deference in a truly regal manner.

After this they set forth again. It was no longer difficult to make Chimabahoi talk. His delight was almost childlike, resulting in a garrulity difficult at times to understand. But Croft realized that the little tribe, with the natives' melancholy sense of fatalism, had become

convinced of its extinction, this conviction producing inertia. Apparently all attempts at cultivation had ceased, with all forethought for future generations.

The Papuans are not skilful sailors. Croft was prepared to find that no seagoing enterprise had ever existed, and that no ships ever passed this way; though there was a legend of white men being seen upon the island and disappearing again, some generations before, when the tribe had become nearly extinguished by an epidemic. The unusually high reef might partly account for this extraordinary isolation, Croft reflected, while he listened to the chief's mournful tale of decreasing numbers.

"We can no longer provide feasts of man-flesh, Great Chief," he concluded apologetically, "unless it be thy command——"

Croft simulated disappointment over this. Barbara's unbounded relief, when he passed on the information, caused him some amusement. The prospect of feeding upon cannibal diet had been hardly less trying than the fear of providing it.

When they emerged from the southern end of the forest, the little colony of huts came into view. The verdure grew right down to the settlement; on both sides rose steep hills of considerable height. Standing in the deep water of the lagoon were stakes with what are known as "crows' nests" attached—supposed to be charms to attract fish, which are then shot with bow and arrow, or speared. This sight was familiar to Croft, who explained it eagerly to the girl.

He was exhilarated, she could see, by the success, thus far, of this daring venture. With no fears for the hours ahead, he was boyishly enjoying the humor of the situation. She marveled, too, at her own composure, when

they drew near the shore. Calmly walking into the stronghold of the cannibals! Truly, this was adventure!

"The huts are deserted," she observed. "Where is everybody?"

"Dressing for dinner, perhaps," he suggested lightly. "Oh, lord! I *am* dry. And they won't supply a whisky and soda! I suppose gods don't smoke, do they? Celestial life has its drawbacks."

"I wonder what they wear?"

"Who? Gods?"

"No. The natives—for dinner."

He gave a shout of laughter, causing Chimabahoi to jump with fright.

"Oh, just a reed or two, maybe. What we may come to, yet."

Barbara said no more.

VII

The cause of the deserted appearance of the place was soon clear. Chimabahoi led his guests round the western outskirts of the little settlement, toward the belt of verdure reaching down on that side almost to the lagoon. Here, in a large clearing used for council chamber, with carpet of moss, walls of lofty trees, roof frescoed with blue and green tracery, was assembled apparently the entire tribe.

Upon the white chief's appearance a wailing murmur arose, interspersed by the occasional frightened cry of a child. At a shout from their chief, they all fell upon their faces. Three times they raised their bodies, swaying backward, then down again to the earth. After the third obeisance they rose to their feet, eying the strangers curiously, fearfully.

And with much the same curiosity did the English girl look upon these primitive creatures of her own sex. Many of the women, as well as men, were naked; others wore short skirts, corresponding to the men's loin-cloths, made from hand-woven reed matting, colored chiefly red and black by the dyes obtained from local plants. Short of stature, both men and women were of small build, their long heads covered with frizzy black hair which was sometimes tied with vegetable fiber into a multitude of little tufts; the sooty-black faces were conspicuous for breadth of nose and thickness of lip. Some appeared intelligent, some dull or stupid, others merely fierce with the fierceness of untamed animals.

While the old chief launched into a lengthy oration, and as she watched the varying expressions upon their faces, it dawned upon her that these might be, henceforth, the only human beings in her life! This appalling probability shocked her, as she realized it, with almost the effect of a sudden, reeling blow. Shuddering, she turned from the small dusky bodies and looked at Croft's fine physique. His head was averted, his attention entirely engrossed by Chimabahoi's gabbling speech.

The future conjured up vividly, in all its terrible isolation, seemed for a moment unbearable of sane contemplation. Conscious of mental nausea, like one drowning, she clutched at the only remaining link with life—the companion destined to the same fate. For the first time in her life she called him by name, grasping his arm:

"Alan!"

Quickly he turned, in astonishment.

"We may never see any other human beings!" she gasped.

With his usual swift penetration he understood, by the desperation in her voice and eyes, the overwhelming hor-

rors raised by this thought. For a moment he hesitated; then, pulling her hand down into his, he clasped it close, saying nothing. At his reassuring touch the awful loneliness faded gradually, as the autumn mists when the sun breaks through.

A sudden outburst of exultant cries rent the air. The lengthy eulogy came to an end at last. The pathetic relief in every swarthy breast manifested itself in wild leaps and jubilant shouts.

Croft, like Mr. Micawber, was not slow in seizing an opportunity for eloquence. Raising his free hand to command silence, he glibly reeled off other duties assigned to him.

It was, he stated confidently, the gods' desire that he and his wife should live upon the island to assist the tribe in the recovery of its strength and prosperity. This provoked more uproarious shouting.

"They would have you to cultivate again the *taro* plant, which now is as a weed; weave much tapestry for your huts from the reeds; dry the sliced kernels of the cocoanut; cultivate the cotton seed. Then, perchance, when we remove to other lands, we shall send great ships hither with wondrous gifts in return for the fruits of your toil." Further shouts arose. "The gods would have us to visit freely your habitations and show you how to prevent the pestilences which devour your numbers. And"—stopping yet wilder outbursts of enthusiasm—"ye shall, in return, yield unto me gifts of spears, tapestry, implements for cultivating the ground, and all things needed by a white chief upon your land."

This program was vociferously acclaimed; but Croft's experience of natives was too wide to allow of reliance upon their momentary enthusiasm. Flashing a stern glance around, he awed them into silence.

"If all this is done peacefully," he continued, in threatening tones, "ye shall rest in safety. But if again your hands are lifted against us, your bodies shall be burned afresh with blue fire-devils! Your women shall be slain; your little ones thrown to the sharks! The wrath of your god will I bring down," waving his hand threateningly skyward, "and turn you into tortured slaves, if ever again ye molest the great white chief or his wife!"

Fear overawed the natives' enthusiasm. They fell on their faces again, babbling incoherently of obedience and mercy. He motioned them to rise; then he drew back, satisfied of being able henceforth to play upon their superstitions. He had established comparative safety for them both, for the time being at all events, and explained the scene to Barbara, exultantly.

She listened in amaze, marveling at the ease with which this man ever gained his wildest objects.

This introduction over, Chimabahoi now informed his guest of his privilege in choosing the great sacrifice to be offered up at the close of the feast. Should the great white chief decide upon human sacrifice—— The old man waved toward the crowd of faces, watching in tense apprehension: "All are here, O Mighty Chief."

Upon this arose a chorus of dissentient cries, mixed with shouts of "Meamaa! Meamaa!" The natives pressed forward in eager anxiety.

Chimabahoi glanced up quickly.

"Where is Meamaa? I see her not. Where is Roowa, her husband? And Laalo, her son?"

A little black figure was thrust roughly forward. He glanced round, fearfully, uncertain whether to cry or prove the manhood of his five years. Deciding upon the former course, his eyes, in the act of screwing up, encountered those of the white girl watching him curi-

ously; and he paused, gazing at her, his mouth open. She smiled. A wondering grin slowly overspread his small impish face, and he moved nearer, looking up at her with childish adoration.

For the first time Barbara felt the humanity behind the repulsive exterior of these folk. She held out her free hand. The little fellow came shyly toward it, but some one roughly pulled him back; and she remembered, with some amusement, that she was *tabu!*

Accompanied by much muttering and scuffling, a man whose face was distinctly more intelligent than that of many of his fellows, slowly advanced. Croft watched him closely.

"Roowa!" cried Chimabahoi, "where are Meamaa and thy babe, that they obeyed not the command to greet the great white chief?"

Many eager voices broke in, before he could reply.

"The babe is sick, O Chief!"

"Sick and like to die! A-aa! a-aa!"

"The scourge, O Chief! It is again in the house of Roowa!"

Roowa looked round him like an animal at bay; which in truth he was, for the native loves his young. "It is no scourge, O Chief!" he cried. "The babe will recover. This day at noon——"

"A-aa!" broke in the eager voices. "At noon she raised her eyelids, but 'twas only for the space of a falling leaf. It is the scourge, O Chief! Let the great white chief save us from the scourge, at the Sacrifice of the Full Moon to-night——"

Roowa uttered a great cry, and fell on his knees before Croft, eyes wild, arms outstretched, babbling protestations and pitiful supplications.

The white man fully realized the craftiness of these

fellows, also the delicacy of his own position, with the necessity of causing no offense in this first action as overlord. His face set in its most determined, impenetrable lines; his eyes flashed round on all present, inspiring fear in the hearts of those upon whom they occasionally rested. Recognizing at last the man he sought, he motioned him forward.

Larger than most, more brutal of countenance, Barbara quickly recognized her late pursuer.

"What is he called?" Croft demanded of Chimabahoi.

"Babooma, O Greatest of Chiefs!"

The two men regarded each other silently; and in the look of the native Croft recognized hatred and defiance, in spite of the fear lurking in the bold eyes which met his own.

"He'd roast well, wouldn't he?" he murmured to Barbara, who gave a horrified gasp.

A dull murmur arose, in which his ear was quick to note hostility. The old chief's face was full of anxiety as he stepped forward, pulling his beard nervously.

"Few have so straight an aim as Babooma, Great Chief. He is of kin to my house. He will become chief in my stead. Many," he added in a low voice, "would have him now; for I am old and my heart is dead with my sons."

"He hath not found favor in my sight," replied the gods' messenger curtly, frowning upon the wretch, whose expression of defiance was rapidly fading. "He hath raised his eyes and his hand to the white chief's wife!" he thundered, glaring ferociously at the now trembling figure.

Like a sudden breeze rippling over a group of poplars, a breath of fear swept across the listening crowd. Babooma began a stream of gabbling protest: he was unaware of the sinfulness of his action; he had not seen the

great chief nor heard of his mission from the gods; it was the Vow. . . .

Croft waved him away.

"Thou knowest now. Take heed, over-bold one!" Then he turned to Roowa, still on his knees in despair.

"Roowa," he asked, "thou lovest thy little ones?"

"A-aa! As myself, Mighty Chief!"

The look in his eyes touched Barbara. It was another glimpse into a human soul, although as yet she understood nothing of his trouble.

"It is well. Take heart, Roowa! My will is not to offer up thy sick babe; but to go with thee now to thy hut, and, perchance, cure the child."

The joy which transfigured the native's face was indescribable. Upon the dismissal of the tribe, he led the visitors to his hut, incoherent in his excitement. As Croft had guessed, the child only suffered from fever, needing more air and cleanliness—the filth and stench being abominable. Ordering those necessities, he produced from his pockets one of his fever antidotes, Meamaa watching him in terrified bewilderment; then he precipitately pushed Barbara out into the fresh air again.

The feast, to which they were now led, was spread upon the ground in an open space between the huts and the lagoon. Only the men squatted round to eat, the women —occupying a lower position—waited upon them, with the pleasant expectation of finishing their leavings.

A large amount of food was set a little apart for the visitors. What remained would be kept in a sacred place for them—not eaten by the others, who would have expected immediate death. A native with a large fern-stalk would have conveyed this food to their mouths, it being against the rules of *tabu* to feed themselves lest they should touch that most sacred *tabued* spot, the head!

Croft, however, with some ingenious invention of his resourceful gods, waived this rite.

The food was quite palatable, and Barbara registered some mental notes for future culinary experiments. In addition to fish, birds, and raw fruit, there were many made dishes in which cocoanut predominated in some form, though never presented raw. Breadfruit was conspicuous, yams, reminding her of potatoes, pandanus fruit, the liquid of the cocoanut forming their beverage. What could not be broken by their fingers was cut by a peculiar kind of knife made from sharp shells fixed in cocoanut handles.

To a carefully-reared European girl it was a strange sight. The large circle of black naked and semi-naked figures decked with necklaces and armlets of shell, or garlands of flowers, jabbered incomprehensibly, showing their white teeth in bursts of uproarious merriment, grabbing their food with both hands and consuming it with greedy haste. The old chief sat near in his usual regalia; Croft squatted comfortably beside him, talking with the ease of one accustomed to this mode of life from birth. Behind them clustered the little bamboo huts, some thatched with palm-leaf, some with reed-matting; away below glittered white sand, bounded by the brilliant blue of the lagoon, its high reef gleaming in the distance.

With fleeting amusement her mind flashed to the conventional meals at home, and she imagined the effect upon the Darburyites had they been present. Aunt Mary would doubtless have ordered trousers from the nearest tailor for those happy, unashamed sons of nature!

This reflection enabled her to understand the reason of their appearance seeming so natural. They had not learned to regard their bodies as objects of shame to be

covered and hidden; or, by half revealing, to degrade the wonders and beauty of the human form to mere incentives to sensuality. They were, in truth, sons of nature, shorn of vulgarity, innocent as children in the joyous freedom of their limbs warmed by the sun and cooled by the winds and rain. Some of the fundamental realities by reason of which they appealed to Croft caused her heart, also, to warm toward them; even as the humanity in the eyes of Roowa and his little son had done. A primitive, sensuous delight in the scene swept over her. She remembered Croft's words: "At the very bedrock of nature." A strange exultation at the thought made the blood tingle in her veins.

When at last the long meal ended, after the women had fallen upon the remains like vultures, musical instruments were produced—conch shells, reed flutes, bamboo drums. To their accompaniment were chanted native folk songs, historic legends or myths—mournful, wailing, age-old laments over distant tragedies, producing an eerie sensation of fatalism, of horrors ever lurking in the shadows, of superstitions yet held in dread. Singularly appropriate gestures—the result of dramatic instinct, not trained art—emphasized the weird singing. The men bowed their bodies to the earth; beat their hands; raised them toward the setting sun; rolled their eyeballs. The women hugged themselves, swaying, with closed eyes, from side to side. The voices sank gradually to a low monotone; were broken by a sudden wail; answered by another; sank again, murmuring and muttering; until only the elfin-like music of the shells and reeds remained, seeming to embody the spirit of this Island of Singing Waters—the wind whispering among the palms, the wavelets rippling in the lagoon, the many hues of moss and tree, coral and sand. . . .

Then, with dramatic suddenness, a wild, jubilant song of conquest burst forth, a spasmodic outburst of barbaric joy, with laughter, yells, clapping——. It ceased as abruptly as it began; with no carefully constructed conclusion, yet in perfect rhythm. The company sank down exhausted, grinning and talking together.

Alan turned to Barbara, his eyes glowing.

"Isn't that real music? The natural outpouring of the very soul! Doesn't it make you realize the harmony we spoke of——?" He stopped, surprised by the corresponding glow in her own eyes. "Do you still feel far from life?"

"No!" she exclaimed. "You were right. This is vital—real!"

They became aware that all eyes were now fastened on them. The sun had set. The sacrifice must be decided upon. An air of anxiety, of strained expectation, was manifest.

Croft's wits had not been slumbering. To find a sufficiently important substitute for a human victim was not easy upon an island where it was impossible to chance, like Abraham, upon a convenient "ram caught in a thicket."

"Our gods have told me," he informed Chimabahoi confidentially, "that thy god, Balhuaka, doth not hunger for the flesh of man this moon; neither doth he desire fish or bird to be offered unto him. He desireth to taste the dishes thou hast prepared for those who have sailed here from the skies. All that we have left uneaten shalt thou collect, therefore, and offer unto him. It is food *tabu* to those sent by the gods: therefore doth he require it beyond all other food."

This distinct greediness seemed more in character with a peevish child than a celestial being; but to Chimabahoi

it appeared natural enough. He communicated the decision to the tribe, which showed vociferously its unmistakable relief.

The ambrosial remains were therefore gathered together and placed in receptacles of plaited reeds, somewhat resembling Sussex trugs in shape. Lighted reed torches were produced for everybody, and the procession set forth, headed by the old chief and the white visitors. Turning westward through the council chamber, they bore a little inland to the sacred palm grove.

Within a few moments the torches had formed two waving lines of light, as the natives divided upon either side of the central path. The bearers of the sacrifice advanced up the center and laid it upon the unlighted bonfire; the musicians squatted on the ground near the altar, beginning again their uncanny music. Chimabahoi, combining the offices of chief priest, standing before the pile and facing the stone of god, began a long singsong incantation, which lasted for some time. The rest of the tribe occasionally joined in, like a choir or chorus, imitating his gestures, waving their torches high or sweeping them low to the ground, now wailing, now muttering.

The preliminary rites ceased, and Chimabahoi turned to Croft.

"Thou, O Great White Chief, shalt make the flames arise, straight and high! Thus shall we know that our sacrifice is accepted by our god."

The great white chief inclined his head. Stepping forward with the assurance of one used to guiding sacrificial flames from childhood, he advanced to the altar, Barbara watching him in astonishment. There he paused for a solemn moment—whether to give the effect of reverence, or to grasp some elusive memory, or from sheer joy in

the situation, she could not tell. . . . Slowly, at last, he raised his arms, waving the flaring torch high above his head. Then he embarked upon a short display of physical drill, as if invoking the spirits of an unseen host. It impressed the natives into awestruck silence, while filling the girl with an almost irrepressible desire to laugh. After this performance, he bent slowly down and held his torch to the heap of dry sticks and leaves. Immediately the fire caught on, crackling and fizzling, sending up leaping yellow flames and thick curling smoke into the somber vault above. Making a few more arm movements, he watched it; then stepped back. For a fleeting instant his eyes met Barbara's; and both looked quickly away again.

This instant and splendid conflagration was a sign of the offering being acceptable to Balhuaka. Another burst of excited incantation broke from the assembly, the musicians once more blowing upon their reeds and shells. A party of girls sprang forward, whirling, swaying, shaking, leaping—every inch of their bodies part of their rhythmic dance. The higher the flames ascended the more frenzied became the girls' movements and the men's voices. The torches flared, the bonfire bellied forth thick gusts of flame and smoke, its roar mingling with the music and wild singing.

The effect was wondrously barbaric and picturesque, with the high mass of stone outlined against its shadowy background of palms and forest. A primitive desire to shed all remaining shackles of civilization and hurl herself into the midst of the dancing throng, startled Barbara with its force.

At last the flames reached the sacrifice and the air was filled with the smell of burning food.

A great shout went up. The god was even now eating

of their offering! Health and prosperity would be theirs for at least the duration of this moon! The music abruptly ceased; the dancers sank breathless to the ground; an awed hush fell upon the gathering. . . . The foodstuff hissed and sizzled, the burning wood crackled, the flames roared, the wind rustled the leaves of the trees, but of other sound there was none.

When the fire had died down to a glowing heap of red embers, the silence broke stormily in an outburst of joyous hilarity. The procession started back to the settlement, the riotous merriment continuing all the way, the waving torches making the moon seem pale by contrast.

At a small hut on the outskirts Chimabahoi paused, intimating that it was the best they could offer and would in future be *tabu* to the great white chief. Then the revelers dispersed, the torches flickering like miniature fires among the neighboring huts. The man and the girl were left alone.

The barbaric excitement still tingled in their veins and shone in their eyes, when, for a moment, they looked at each other. Instinctively Barbara caught her breath, putting her hand to her throat, as if to wrestle with something choking her; her torch fell to the ground.

"We-we—can't stay—here!" she muttered, half to herself.

She felt his hand upon her arm; the touch sent a wild tremor through her entire frame. It was as if in her wrought-up state, an electric wire had touched her, imparting strange currents which, with waves of magnetism, dragged her close within their field, while simultaneously repelling her with an unknown fear. Feebly she resisted, but his grip tightened, pulling her across the threshold.

"The natives are watching!" he muttered in her ear.

His torch showed the interior to be small and bare, the sole contents being two rolls of reed-matting or "tapestry." Loosing her, he fixed the torch in the ground and took up one of these heaps.

"They roll themselves in this, to sleep," he said. "It will make a substitute for a door."

She mechanically helped him to fix it across the opening. Like revelers in a Continental carnival, the natives were too much excited to settle down for the night; the noise outside was still boisterous.

Alan, the same primitive tingling in his blood, talked rather wildly as he arranged the cover.

"We are savages now! Conventions don't count here. As you remarked, these may henceforth be our sole companions. And they regard you as my—wife—remember!" Finishing his job, he turned round, his eyes glittering in the dim light. "You must play up, too, for—for your own sake. . . . What is it, Barbara? . . . What's the matter?"

By the flickering torchlight, he saw her face go suddenly white, her eyes cling, as if fascinated, to his. He caught both her wrists, pulling her close, his breath coming fast, his hands not steady.

"What is it?" he repeated hoarsely. "Why—do you look at me—like that?"

"W-we—can't stay—here!" she muttered again, not moving in his grasp.

"But we—we've shared a hut before—all these weeks! Why are you afraid now? Tell me!" He bent over her. "Tell me, Barbara——"

"I can't . . . I don't know . . . I—I'm not——" Desperately she tried to withdraw her hands and eyes from his. She felt powerless, as if she were slipping

down some precipice into roaring torrents which would engulf her, sweep her away from every known landmark. This was utterly different from that other night's fear. Then it had been fear of him, and tangible. Now it was subtle, terrifying, and—of herself, in some strange way.

He drew her suddenly closer; but, with all the strength of her will, she flung herself back in his grasp.

"Don't—touch me! I don't—understand—— Oh! . . . Alan—help us both!"

The cry was one of desperation. It startled him. For a long moment he gazed deep within her darkened eyes, the blood mounting in his face, throbbing in his temples, his very lips trembling. Then, almost violently, but with a strange look of exultation, he let her go.

"I'll go and see if—if—all's safe outside," he stammered.

She heard him leave the hut; and she sank down in the far corner, trembling violently. . . . She heard him enter later; and she buried her head in her arms.

He threw himself down across the threshold without a word.

From outside, the noise of the revelers still came to their ears, growing gradually fainter . . . and fainter . . . until, at last, silence fell.

VIII

Barbara was sitting cross-legged upon the shore of the lagoon. By her side lay the contents of a diminutive work-bag, upon her knees a shapeless affair of gray homespun.

The subtle workings of a woman's mind impelling certain actions sometimes surpass even her own comprehension. Had Barbara been asked why, on the very

day of their return from the natives' settlement, she had ransacked Aunt Dolly's luggage, selected one of that rotund lady's voluminous skirts and begun to rip the seams, she might have given the obvious reason, but never the true motive. That was vague, shadowy, even to herself; as vague and shadowy as the new peculiar consciousness of her companion. Yet both sprang, in opposition to each other, from the same hidden source.

After that memorable night, they had walked back together early next morning, Alan for the most part silent, Barbara talking feverishly of the natives' feast, music, rites—anything to prevent awkward pauses. From that day another paradoxical phase opened before them. For, though they now had many surface interests in common to heighten their companionship, the wall between was yet more strengthened. And, this time, it was the girl who unconsciously built up the crumbling bricks with hasty fingers, not daring to look at that yawning precipice beyond.

Yet, although resolutely replacing any fallen bricks, the wish to pull them down, to win the intimacy previously denied her, increased a hundredfold. Daily, as she became more contented with her strange life, more engrossed by its occupations, did her companion absorb more completely her subconscious mind. She only occasionally realized this. Then, with a sharp stab half of fear, half compunction, she quickly forced her thoughts away, focussing them resolutely upon the old life rapidly fading into distance.

The ease with which the past slipped away, the growing fascination of this wild existence among primitive surroundings, became alarming. She felt at times intoxicated with it all—the subtle perfumes and radiant colors,

the languorous heat, cool night breezes, the wonders of sea and forest, the mysterious excitement which seemed to make every hour so vivid. . . . Never realizing the irrevocability of the change, working like leaven within, she clutched at old recollections, as a drowning man will grasp at elusive seaweed—the memory of Hugh becoming the chief anchor in this chaotic sea, which rose daily higher.

She was doing this now, as she opened the last seam in the gray cloth; yet her ears were ever alert, listening to the lively whistling which came from the new hut now receiving its finishing touches.

Presently she held out the pieces of material, contemplating them with knitted brow, then laying them in turn against an outstretched leg. Acting upon some sudden impulse, she scrambled to her feet, dropping scissors and cloth, and hurried toward the sound.

They had built two parallel bamboo huts adjoining the old one. The idea was to use the original for kitchen or larder, the central one for a sitting-room, reserving the third for sleeping apartments. After a considerable amount of hard work, lashing the interlaced canes and palm-leaves together with fiber from suitable forest trees, the little abode was turning out a great success.

Croft, mounted upon a pile of luggage, was completing the roof when she appeared. She came close to the ladder of suit-cases and watched him, smiling.

"Alan," she said presently, "will you lend me a pair of breeches?"

The whistling abruptly ceased, and the ladder swayed perilously. He looked down, laughter wrinkling the lines round his eyes.

"Breeches! What the devil——"

"I want them for a pattern."

"A pattern?"

Barbara blushed a little, and he threw some leaves down upon her.

"You bold parson's daughter! Cover your blushes in those."

"You have a—another pair; haven't you?" she asked, ducking her head.

"You don't imagine you'd get any if I hadn't?" He took a flying leap from his perch, landing by her side. "Does Eve covet Adam's fig-leaves, now?" he continued, giving her a quick amused glance. "Are you renouncing feminine charms?"

Whether he penetrated with one random dart to those vague and shadowy motives, she could not tell. Certain it is that the blush deepened in her sunburned cheek; and equally certain was the light which momentarily filled his eyes, as he turned away toward the doorway.

"Here you are!" he cried, presently emerging again with an old tweed pair considerably the worse for wear. "My gods would have thee return them unto me. They are very torn and may be slightly large for you——"

"I don't want to *wear* them! These will do all right." She took them from him and was moving away, when he laid his finger in the crook of her arm.

"The inside entrances are finished now. Come and see," he said, leading her into the old hut.

She went through the neat little doorway into the central room, looking round at the window apertures and cool shadiness with the critical pleasure of a joint-architect. In her face also was the pride of the housewife, full of private, visionary schemes.

"Isn't it jolly? We can make it so cozy!"

"When we have made more furniture and brought in that from the old 'bus," he agreed.

That he could touch lightly now on what had brought, with its merest thought, such agonies of tragic memories and baffled hopes, was significant.

They passed into the sleeping hut, a tiny square of which formed one compartment, and Barbara uttered a quick exclamation.

"What is it?" he inquired.

"You—there's no connection between!"

He looked down at her curiously, unaware that all those weeks only the knowledge of his nearness, with but an incomplete partition dividing them, had enabled her to sleep tranquilly in face of possible native treachery. This absolute separation brought sudden apprehension, and she spoke impulsively as usual.

"If the natives came, you would seem very far off!"

Without replying, he took out his clasp-knife and led her to the dividing wall between the two little rooms. "Where shall I put it? Here?" Lightly drawing the knife across the bamboo he partly severed a few canes. As he leaned forward, his left hand tightened upon her bare elbow. . . . Swiftly the same wild tremor shot through her frame which had alarmed her with its magnetism in the natives' hut; and with it came an echo of the lifelong conventions in which her years had been steeped. She drew away from him, hurriedly.

"No! Don't do it. I—it's better not. Please don't!"

Slowly he turned round, and his gray eyes pierced hers. She lowered them in hot confusion. Dropping the knife, he took her by the shoulders; in his mind, also, the memory of that night among the natives—one of the sign-posts in both their lives.

"Which do you really mean, Barbara?"

"I mean—that: don't!"

"Why not?"

She could not reply. His nearness set her blood racing. She looked round the little room like a frightened caged bird.

Then, no word being spoken, she felt the touch of his fingers on her throat. He raised her chin, turning her face upward, so that she was bound to meet the close scrutiny of his eyes or shut her own. The precipice seemed to yawn wide at her feet . . . the wall to crumble. . . . Sudden terror possessing her, she seized his hand, trying to pull it away, gasping:

"L-let—me—go!"

Abruptly he loosed her; and she turned and fled.

He remained where he was, motionless, a dark smoldering fire burning deep in the eyes she had feared to meet. Presently he turned to the "window" overlooking the lagoon, and gazed out beyond the distant reef as if seeing horizons far away, limitless, unbounded by any reef of coral, untouched by the leveling hand of civilization. . . . Then his gaze, coming back to realities, rested upon the girl seated near the shore; and to his face came the same arrogant, conquering look which had been there after his long vigil on their first night upon the island. . . .

Barbara had returned to her task, every nerve tingling, full of vague fear. Desperately she sought to banish thought, absorbing her mind with the self-imposed work in hand. Utilizing his breeches for a pattern, she cut up Aunt Dolly's skirt into something resembling their shape. Afterward, she sat for some time with her eyes fixed upon the rents in the rough tweed. . . .

Although the wall was to be built up stronger than ever, the mending of a helpless man's torn garments surely could not matter?

A little later she returned to prepare the supper, with a patched pair of breeches upon her arm—the patches consisting of quite contrasting material. She handed them, rather diffidently, to their owner. Her fears over the crumbling wall were annulled, however, by one glance at his indifferent face. He took his repaired property without the least surprise.

"I hoped you would do that," he coolly remarked. "I have some torn shirts, too, if you have enough cotton?"

Thus it came to pass that the management of his limited wardrobe gradually became one of her employments. Tony Field's prophecy to Aunt Dolly never recurred to her mind. . . . It proved strangely pleasant, during his absences in search of food, to mend and wash for him. . . .

From a pocket-book diary they were able to keep count of the days and nights which flitted by so rapidly now. The natives left them alone; save when, at Croft's command, they brought rolls of reed-matting, or swords, spears, implements. Only one, as he knew well, still hid defiance under the cloak of subjection, biding his time.

Thus, for a while, all danger seemed past. Barbara, blissfully unconscious of any flaw in this pact of friendship, lost her fear of these childlike folk. Having proved the effect of a random shot from the revolver, she felt safe.

By means of tools saved from the wreck, and native implements, Croft made certain rough objects of furniture to supplement those brought from the aeroplane cabin.

With matting upon the ground, flowers and ferns deftly arranged, Barbara's photograph of Hugh—the only picture they possessed—upon the wall, the new "sitting-room" soon presented a home-like appearance. In her bedroom stood a cabin cupboard converted into a combined chest-of-drawers-dressing-table-washstand. A brainy construction of wood, matting and aeroplane canvas formed a bed, the fleece lining from her coat being adroitly turned into a mattress.

The week before Christmas found them, therefore, fitted into their surroundings with extraordinary ease; much as the instruments of an orchestra, different though they appear, blend in one harmonious whole. The great Orchestra of Life, ascending all around them here with their glorious freedom and that which worked within their hearts, swept them up with it, ever closer to its hidden keynote. Only the preliminary bass blasts of tragedy were audible at first, filling the air with their fear "motif" and the knowledge of dangers yet to come. But, in time, the sweet faint melody penetrated softly through, growing more distinct, more dominant—fascinating them, overmastering them with its haunting rhythm, so that all else slowly faded into subservience. The present alone seemed sufficient. An era of peace had come, of pleasant companionship and healthy employment.

Barbara was basking in the peace which, mirage-like, surrounded her. After that day upon which the new hut was completed, the holes in the hidden wall were no more than chinks. Having long ago given up any attempt to discover the working of her companion's mind, she was content in the phase of surface friendship now existing between them.

One evening, shortly before Christmas Day, having prepared their supper, she wandered down to the shore, waiting for Alan's arrival. Sitting idle upon a rock, she watched the spray and foam glistening in the sunshine against the distant reef, her thoughts occupied by a variety of small things—chief among them being a cottonless future! The constant mending of their combined wardrobe had drained her slender resources of thread. Pins had been resorted to that day. Alan sat on one and swore loudly; she smiled lingeringly over the recollection. . . .

Her face sobered and she leaned forward, then rose quickly to her feet. The tide, which does not alter much in the Pacific, was at its highest. Slowly moving through the clear water, not far from the shore, appeared a large gray outline suggesting in its general shape an airship. Barbara drew in her breath quickly, watching the silent bulk glide slowly by, until, making a large circuit, it disappeared in the direction of the reef.

It was, she guessed, a shark.

For the first time the remembrance dawned upon her of islands in the Pacific Ocean being often shark-infested; the recollection brought, in a flash, full realization of the risks Alan took when he swam with her to land.

With another chaotic tumult of mind, she remembered Alan's further risks when salving all necessities for their comfort, his stubborn refusal of her offers of help, his stringent commands against bathing in the lagoon. . . . She realized, too, his consideration in not mentioning this horrible danger to add to her dread of those which already menaced their lives.

A wave of gratitude—or admiration—swept over her, and she covered her face, hiding the hot involuntary blush,

shutting out the sudden, unbearable glory of sky and sea. . . .

Presently, lowering her hands, she turned her glowing face inland. . . . With a gasp, she grew rigid.

A heavy cloud of smoke hung in dense plumes over the hilltop! Even as she looked, a long jagged flame leapt up . . . then another, and another. . . . The beacon was on fire!

She gazed at it, fascinated. What did it mean? Rescue at last? The rescue for which they had looked, and longed, and lived, all these weeks and months. . . Suddenly, like a heavy cloak, all the previous excitement and exultation fell from her.

A feeling as of a cold wind, full of vague foreboding, chilled her heart in that warm evening air.

IX

Near the blazing fire stood Croft. His hands hung loosely at his sides; his gaze was fixed upon the distant, heaving water. At the sound of the girl's hurrying steps, he turned quickly. The apprehension in her face, instead of the wild hope he expected, found a reflection in his own, together with a curious leaven of disappointment and—unmistakably—relief.

"A ship!" he announced briefly.

"Is it coming?"

"No."

Silently they looked at each other: the man inscrutable as ever, the girl clasping and unclasping her hands, her lips a little tremulous. In the turmoil of her emotions, she sank upon the ground at last, and buried her head in her hands.

Croft looked at her, his own feelings in much the same

chaotic state. The hope of once again playing his part among his fellow-men—dear to a man of action—of achieving the ambitions ruthlessly destroyed at the very moment of attainment, had been raised and dashed almost simultaneously. But in that same moment he faced the full knowledge of what all this Eden-like existence meant to him—the immensity of his increasing hopes, bitter-sweet in their uncertainty. And, as the flames ascended, he faced abruptly the probable termination of it all!

He controlled, but not without difficulty, the emotions rioting within his heart, when those tense few minutes, fraught with so much meaning—such crucial pages in the Book of Fate—relaxed. When the far-off spiral of smoke faded into the clouds, as the distant vessel vanished, he leaped upon a boulder and threw his arms wide. The gesture might have been a welcome to freedom, or an acquiescence in the inevitable; in either case it savored of "kismet."

Barbara glanced up at him. There seemed something familiar in his poise and action. . . . The memory of a foolish, far-off dream in England recurred to her mind. She had been lost in the darkness; when, calling for Hugh, she had reached the light, the entrance had been barred by this man's figure and outflung arms. . . .

He turned suddenly toward her.

"I am sorry," he said. "I feared it would upset you—to-day."

"Why to-day?" she asked curiously.

A look of incredulity crept into his face.

"It is December twentieth. Wasn't that to be your—wedding-day?"

She sank back, staring at him blankly. Twice she

opened her lips to speak, but no words came. At last, slowly, she turned her gaze seaward.

"It was!" she murmured. "I—had—forgotten." Again her head drooped into her hands.

Low as the words were, he heard them. A wild joy flashed through him. Because he dared not trust himself or his voice, he left her—dashing, with throbbing pulse, toward the palm grove. Was there a singing in the air around, as if every bird upon the island had mistaken coming night for the dawn, or was it the inward song of his heart?

Throwing off his clothes, he plunged into the river, swimming as if his life depended on it. Then he floated slowly, luxuriously, on his back, gazing up through the overhanging foliage into the golden evening light.

"Mine!" he cried aloud. "Mine—mine—mine!"

The ripple of the water and the soft rustle of bamboo were his only answer. He scrambled out; pressed the moisture from his thick hair; then laughed aloud, as he threw himself down upon the ground, letting the breeze dry his gleaming limbs—hiding his face among the soft moss. . . .

For long Barbara sat where he had left her, without looking up, though knowing that she was alone. She faced her shrinking soul for the first time; the beacon burned itself out beside her; the sun sank lazily in a sky aflame.

Until to-day she had taken for granted the supposition that, underneath the growing enchantment of this land, the craving for Hugh and rescue still predominated. . . . Full of shame, she realized this supposition to have been but a bubble burst at this first test. She understood, with a sense of shock, the small space now occupied by

Hugh in her thoughts. Yet—he seemed, in memory, as dear as ever. Tears brimmed in her eyes: she realized, at last, how this very dearness proved its vast separation from love. . . .

Her imagination pictured to-day as it would have been. She saw Darbury Church decorated with flowers, the bridesmaids, the cobbler's wife thumping out the Bridal March from *Lohengrin,* her mother in tears, Hugh's elderly parents all smiles, Hugh himself with his bright crisp hair, the shade over the left eye, waiting at the altar. . . . By now the ceremony would be over, as time counted here; they would have left together for that much-disputed honeymoon. To-night would have been her wedding-night. . . .

She drew in her breath sharply, looking down at the dancing waves, the gleaming coral, the palms. Had that passing vessel received their signals, in a short time this would all have become as a dream, the pictured ceremony the tangible fact. . . .

Like a bird newly aware of freedom after narrowly escaping capture, she stood up and again looked around with lingering eyes, which now knew how close a hold the brilliant scene had upon her heart. If ever rescue came, it would bring pangs of grief instead of the unalloyed joy she had supposed. . . . Again her thoughts turned to Hugh, wondering what were his feelings to-day. . . . And her sensitive heart smote her, overwhelming her with renewed shame. . . .

When at last she returned to the hut, it was empty. Entering her little room, the sight of Croft's contrivances for her comfort brought back the memory of what she had seen in the water; brought, also, the same sense of rapturous gratitude. . . . Hardly conscious of the reason,

she fought against it with some miserable idea of its disloyalty to Hugh.

Thought was becoming an unbearable confusion. Hurriedly she set about laying supper, hoping vainly to still the awakened depths; then sought further occupation. Her glance fell upon her luggage. With sudden decision, probably induced by a hazy idea of recapturing the instincts of civilization to combat unruly emotions, she seized a box and opened it. . . .

When presently Croft returned, he was met on the threshold by a wistful-eyed figure clothed in something soft and white and altogether womanly, instead of the blouse and old short skirt. He stopped abruptly; then with rather grim lips, smiled.

"So we returned to civilization in spirit, if not in fact?"

His uncanny knack of reading her motives caused her to give him, as usual, the swift deep-sea glimpse which he sought. But the glimpse to-night lengthened, widening into a stare of astonishment.

"What have you done, Alan?"

"Done? Bathed and—oh, yes! I cut my hair. It was getting so dashed long——"

She broke into irrepressible laughter.

"What's the matter?" he asked, feeling his head.

"It looks as if you had used blunt garden-shears!"

He tried, ineffectually, to smooth the jagged tufts, which stuck out rakishly from his temples, or rose upright on the top of his head. "I only had my clasp-knife."

Her laugh subsided, an expression almost maternal creeping into her face.

"After supper I will cut it properly for you."

He looked momentarily astonished. "All right. But we must be quick, or it will be too dark."

"There's a moon."

"H'm! Don't think I fancy hair-cutting by moonlight. Sounds horribly unsafe!"

She laughed again. This trifling amusement was what she craved—anything to banish reflection!

When the meal ended, she disappeared into her room, returning with scissors and something white and lacy.

"What's that?" Alan demanded, eying the white material with suspicion.

"Only a petticoat. To put round your shoulders."

"My shoulders! But—surely that's the wrong place to wear it?"

"Come outside and sit down," she retorted, feeling for once in the position of "top-dog."

He seated himself obediently upon the rock outside the hut, allowing her to fold the petticoat round him for a barber's sheet. Taking the lacy ends gingerly between his fingers, he pulled them across his chest. Then, unexpectedly, he threw back his head to look into the face bending above him, before she could lower her eyes. And he surprised an expression which sent the blood tingling through his veins. . . .

"You must sit still!" she exclaimed hurriedly, in confusion. "Or I may cut you. Will—will you please bend your head? That's better. Fix your eyes on the reef, and keep rigid."

Like a carved image—if images ever are carved swathed in petticoats—he sat in silence, giving no outward sign of the tumult rioting within. Only the "snip, snip," of the scissors sounded in the still air.

Barbara was feeling unhinged after the events of the day—full of strange emotions which she could not fathom. There was something extraordinarily attractive, unusually

gentle, about her companion to-night. The rough dark hair seemed characteristic of him; it was vital, full of wiry strength and unexpected little twists . . her fingers lingered over it, almost caressingly. The sound of his voice roused her from her dreaming.

"When will your hair need cutting, Barbara?"

"Oh! Never! I mean, that is, I—I can do it myself."

"It is like a dark cloud," he said musingly. "I saw it all, loose and rippling——"

"When?" sharply. Why were her fingers so unsteady?

"On our first night here."

A wave of red suffused the face behind him, and she made no reply: a tuft of hair near one of his ears seemed to be engrossing her attention. He fell silent again, too, acutely conscious of the fingers lightly touching his head.

"I wonder," he began irrelevantly again, "what is happening now in England. Do you long for it all, Barbara—the crowded towns, the gaiety? It's probably snowing, and the London shops are bright for Christmas." He paused. The hand with the scissors had dropped to his shoulder, and she stood very still. He turned his head to look up at her. "'Vast cities' were your idea of life; weren't they? It's cruel for you to be here—to-night of all nights—cutting my old hair; when——" He stopped again, his eyes, narrowed a little, closely watching her expressive face.

"It's worse for you," she said softly. "Alan—I want to tell you something."

"Well?"

She looked up slowly. For one mad moment an overwhelming desire possessed her to clasp that dark head in her arms, bow her own upon it, and sob out all the pent-up troubles of her heart—all the old lonely bitterness,

and the new bewildering self-revelations experienced to-day.

"What is it?" he asked, breathing rather quickly at what he saw in her eyes.

"I saw a shark to-day. And," hurriedly, "I—oh, Alan! I realized all you have done for me, all you have risked, and spared me——"

"All my invisible halo in fact?"

She ignored the flippancy. "And I feel simply full of—of——"

"Of—what, Barbara? What?"

"Gratitude——"

"Gratitude!" He turned away, with a short laugh.

"I can do so little in turn to make things tolerable for you here," she went on, in the warmth of her heart.

"Your life was so full——"

He looked round again quickly. "No fuller than yours with the man you——"

"Ah!" she interrupted passionately. "Don't! I—know."

Her voice went into silence. For a long time he sat watching the darkness creep swiftly over the water, his hands tightly clenched upon the petticoat.

A fierce craving for advice, sympathy, even disapproval, so long as she could unburden her agitated mind, mastered the girl. She took one of her old impulsive plunges.

"I am so troubled!" she exclaimed suddenly, starting to snip rapidly and furiously.

He seized the hand with the scissors and drew it back to his shoulder.

"No priest could stand confession with that weapon leveled at his head! Tell me just what is troubling you," he answered, his voice softening. "Loneliness?"

The clasp of his fingers encouraged confidence.

"No, no! Just what you have said, to-night. I *don't* long for it all. Oh, I know you must be horrified. But I *don't!* This wild life, this lovely island, seem to creep up and up, engulfing me, so that I—dread the thought of the old restricted existence. Alan, it's terrible. It—it's intoxicating—it frightens me! I never crave for the world and a wider sphere, as I did in Darbury. I know I ought to be pining for rescue; to long for—for—those at home; to be unhappy. I've tried, honestly! But——"

Laughter interrupted her. He raised his free hand and took hers, holding both tightly on his shoulders.

"*Tried!* Have you really? Then—you are happy here?"

"That's the trouble; don't you see? I don't know why, but I am. I was even glad when the ship didn't come to-night! It's just as if there's some spirit in this island which—draws one up and up—— Do you think me utterly heartless?"

He laughed again; and she wondered at the exultant ring of it.

"I think you're a goose—waking up! Have you only just realized the—'spirit'—on the island?" Then he became serious. "How could your unhappiness help those in England? They have long ago given us up for dead. Besides, no forced emotions are worth anything."

"No. That's the chief point: they shouldn't need to be forced. Hugh—once—called me heartless——"

He drew her hands downward, pulling her up close behind him.

"I'm going to talk quite straight, Barbara. I gather the real fact is—you are not fretting for—Hugh?"

She made no reply; but the fingers in his closed spasmodically. He went on, his voice low, and deeply earnest.

"Love can be forced least of all. If circumstances combine to prove that mistakes have been made, it is no good struggling against the knowledge! However painful, it is better than a lifetime of vain regret. One of the cruellest tragedies in this funny old world is the case with which such mistakes can be made—unconsciously—all in good faith."

He turned his face upward, and caught the glint of tears in her eyes. "Ah, my dear! Don't take it so much to heart."

She gave a strangled little sob. "He—cared. Hugh will ever be—faithful. He is the truest——"

"Yes, I know; one of the very best. But marriage with him wouldn't have satisfied your nature. You know that."

"Oh!" she cried, startled. "But I shall still marry him—if we get rescued. Please don't think me so disloyal as all that!"

He smiled over this third unconscious appeal for his good opinion. "D'you call it loyal, then, to carry out a compact when the very motive upon which it was founded has proved an illusion? You would be living a lie all your life—unfair to you both. Surely he wouldn't wish it?"

She remembered that, according to Tony Field, this man had "rummy ideas."

"You don't quite understand," she protested. "I am just as fond of him. It would still be the same."

"How could it be the same? You did not realize the illusion in the old days. You do now—your every word admits it!"

She remained uncomfortably silent. The darkness was quickly descending upon them. Night birds flitted across the shadows, calling to one another, or darting swiftly

after some prey; a few stars glimmered in the blue-black sky; the drowsing sea murmured its eternal song. Alan suddenly leaned his head back, resting it against her breast.

"Barbara," he said softly, "the love of man and woman is not *fondness*."

She could not speak. The pressure of his dark head set a tumult of emotions loose within her. Her heart seemed to rise in her throat and throb there; her limbs trembled. In sudden panic she tried to free her hands, her womanhood realizing his manhood as it had never consciously done before. The instinct of the wild bird to flee and hide was hers. Her turmoil communicated itself to him, in that vibrant silence. He looked up into her face, seeing there what he had but glimpsed on the night in the natives' hut.

"Barbara!" he whispered shakily, "Barbara! Be true to yourself——"

With a little cry, she wrenched her hands free. As he sprang to his feet she turned, and, without a word, fled into the hut. . . .

He stood still for a minute; then he drew a quick unsteady breath, and strode to the shore, to pace up and down, up and down, far into the night. . . .

Barbara lay awake throughout long hours, facing, in terrible isolation, the great question of sex. What she had dimly realized and vaguely feared, since that revealing moment during their visit to the natives, now loomed up in its naked reality to alter the whole aspect of their life here together. She faced the true position: realized clearly that she and this man were cut adrift from all the safety of other human companionship, all the restraints of civilization, with this terrible, eternal attraction now menacing them. Escape from it was impossible. She

understood now the nature of the abyss yawning below the precipice which had threatened her of late. This new knowledge illumined the past, even to the strange magnetic attraction, half-fear, in the early days of their acquaintance. It terrified her, shaking her confidence. Her one shield and protector in all they had faced now appeared in the light of the enemy against whom she had no ally!

When she remembered the close clasp of his hands, the pressure of his head upon her breast, her pulses throbbed and her face burned. It must quit, she told herself repeatedly: this delightful, impossible tenderness between them must be stopped at once. She must resolutely hide her womanhood, showing nothing but the sexless comrade!

As soon as the soft light of dawn had entered the tiny room, she rose. Taking her scissors, she once more practised the barber's arts. Ruthlessly, her lips tightly set, she cut through handful after handful of her long thick hair, wasting no regrets upon the luxuriant tresses piling round her bare feet.

So far, so good! But it happened that Barbara's heart remained unshorn of its sex, with all its natural tendency to look well. When the hair was cut short to her neck, she hesitated; picked up the diminutive mirror; laid it down; picked up the scissors; hesitated again—then laid them down, and gave her head a vehement shake. The short waves and curls, free from all restraint, followed their own sweet will, waving piquantly around her small head, clustering about her ears. . . .

After this operation, she drew out the gray breeches she had made, understanding now the motive prompting that hasty achievement—after which they had lain idle during the era of peace.

Clad in these, with a loose white blouse, she entered the sitting-room.

Alan stood in the outer doorway, watching a bird preening its bright plumage on a rock. He turned in surprise at her early appearance; but the words of greeting died upon his lips.

"What have you done?" he ejaculated, echoing her words of the previous night.

She laughed self-consciously, giving her "bobbed" head a shake, eluding his eyes.

"Oh! I—just thought I would cut my hair, too," she replied, with elaborate carelessness.

"All your beautiful hair!" he murmured, his gaze never leaving her.

This was neither the tone nor the sentiment she wished to provoke. Resolutely strangling the surprise and delight stirring rebelliously in her heart at this proof of his appreciation, she thrust her hands into the breeches pockets and sauntered toward him. She looked at his cut hair, his deeply tanned face, his straight nose—anywhere but his penetrating eyes.

"Girls are out of place here!" she observed.

He made no reply. She was uncomfortably aware of his piercing, as usual, straight to the heart of her subterfuge. His lips twitched a little. This sudden decision, coming on top of such essential womanliness in the white frock of the night before, was full of revelation.

A moment's reflection, and he had decided on his own course. "I see. Henceforth, then, we are—two gay dogs together? What a good idea!"

His tone was cool enough to reassure a dozen nervous women. She was conscious of a great relief as she joined him in the doorway.

X

THE next few days were strangely happy. After a visit away, a new house seems more home-like; or a friend doubly precious, imagined lost. So the faint chance of rescue caused their little hut to seem dearer, the wild free life more enchanting. The spirits of both had never been so high. The wall entirely disappeared between them, and a new delightful camaraderie took its place. Barbara, having conquered the sex problem with such sublime simplicity, cast it from her mind, surrendering herself wholly to the engrossing happiness of the moment.

That her very subterfuge, proving all it did, had been the death-knell to her object, never entered her head.

On Christmas Eve they collected arms-full of greenery, the girl clinging with unconscious pathos to the old customs in which she had been reared.

"Instead of church," Alan remarked, dumping down his load near the doorway, "we will go for a picnic to the wood on the east coast."

It was the first time he had suggested such an outing together. An absurd, delightful exhilaration caused her to clasp her hands in a thrill that was ecstatic.

"Ah!" she cried inconsequently. "Isn't it all—*beautiful?*"

"What?" he asked, yet knowing full well.

"Oh—everything! Christmas—here! Freedom from Mr. Horne!" She sprang upon a suit-case, trails of vine in her hands, and laughed down at him.

He came close to her, the same ecstasy lurking in his own eyes.

"I wonder if you realize all you have implied?"

"What?" She looked startled.

"I'll tell you to-morrow. I'm going to tell you lots of things to-morrow, Barbara."

She was conscious of a tremor in the ground she thought so sure beneath their feet. Hastily springing down, she moved the suit-case to another spot, and climbed up again with more vine.

"It seems strange," she remarked, turning the subject, "that the only other human beings here know nothing about Christmas."

"They have their own festivals, which are equally important to them."

"But doesn't it seem extraordinary? It's as if the twentieth century were living side by side with prehistoric days! I wonder why it has always been the custom to deify something?"

"It is an inborn instinct," he replied. "However strong or self-reliant people may be, there is always an inherent instinct of dependence upon something stronger. And because that something is an unknown force, men try to capture it, cage it, personify it in some way. These old superstitions are only forerunners of later creeds and customs."

"The trouble is," she said rather warmly, "that each age gets so embedded in its own special groove of orthodoxy that little but the outward observances remain. D'you know what I sometimes think, when I look back at—the world?"

"What?" He handed her some ferns.

"That if Christ came to earth again to alter any of His teaching, the Church would be among the last to recognize Him!"

"What shocking ideas for a parson's daughter! But it's quite probable. It would be her well-meant zeal

which would blind her. Dogma, doctrine, creeds—all the hundred things which have sprung up and proved substitutes for the one keynote comprising all His teaching!"

"'Keynote' again?" she smiled down at him.

"Yes," he replied, meeting her eyes fully. "You are going to tell me to-morrow that you—too—have found it here, now!"

She turned away, and fastened a vine-tendril to the bamboo. He watched her silently, noticing the change wrought in her by these past months. The wild-rose air had vanished: in its stead the warm blood flowed red beneath a sunburned skin; her limbs showed sturdy in their boyish attire; her feet were brown and hardened. Yet, where the depths were concerned, remained the old timidity which was, paradoxically, her greatest lure and protection. One false step and she would, he knew, be "off on the wing," scared as a young partridge. But Alan's small store of patience had been drained to the last dregs.

Finishing the decoration, she paused beside him, considering the effect. Ferns and palm-leaves swayed in the corners; trailing greenery decorated walls and roof; flowers stood upon the cabin-table.

"Cozy, isn't it?" she asked, looking up for his approval.

"Very cozy!" he replied, looking only at her. "What a little home-maker you are."

She flushed, and again turned hastily away.

"We'll hang this remaining vine over the entrance, outside. Will you bring the suit-cases?"

He carried out the substitute for a ladder; and up she sprang. Deftly, with the art of experience, she caught the trailing foliage up here, letting it hang in clusters there.

"And that middle cluster?" asked Alan, beside her. "Is that for mistletoe?"

Her head rose quickly, as that of a young deer scenting danger. With a quick glance down at him, she stretched out her hand toward the bunch; but he put up a long arm to prevent its removal. And, in a flash, all the security of the past days fell to ruins. For, while she strove again to seize the vine-leaves, the suit-cases overbalanced, and she toppled down upon him.

He caught her and held her. He clasped her close to a thumping heart, and buried his face in her hair. . . .

For a moment she lay inert; then she began to struggle, gasping, sobbing.

But his self-control was going. His grip became fierce; she felt his hot breath upon her neck. . . .

"Alan!" she cried wildly. "For God's sake——!"

The fear, as of one drowning, in the cry, steadied his reeling senses. Still clasping her in his arms, he sank down upon the rock. His darkened eyes mesmerized her own; the abyss yawned wide at her feet . . . she was conscious only of being swept along, caught in some remorseless torrent, toward the edge of the precipice . . . slipping, falling . . . his lips were close to her own. . . .

"Alan!" with almost superhuman effort she managed to gasp his name again. "I can't bear it. No! No! Be merciful!"

Faintly, with parched mouth, the desperate petition seemed wrung from her very soul.

His arms relaxed abruptly, a subtle change coming into their grasp when he realized her trembling.

"Why are you afraid?" he murmured unsteadily.

She raised herself, her face very white under its sunburn.

"Don't you see? If you do—*this,* how can I go on living with you here?"

He smiled faintly, the mad tumult of his blood abating.

"Where else would you live? With the natives for—chaperonage?"

She drew a sobbing breath, looking around with a pathetic gesture of helplessness which touched his heart. The passion faded yet more from his face. He pressed her against him again, this time protectively.

"It's a damned lonely position for you!" he exclaimed. Then he rose, with such precipitancy that she nearly fell. He began walking up and down outside the hut.

Instead of hurrying away, she hesitated, watching him in bewilderment—conscious of a strange longing to remain near him, to saunter together on the shore, as was sometimes their habit at night.

But when, at last, he paused near her, he made no such suggestion.

"Go to bed," he said rather curtly; "it's late. And, Barbara, don't lie awake all night, or cut off the rest of your hair! It's all—useless."

With that he turned away, and went off alone to the beach, leaving her staring after him.

Strangely enough, she did not lie awake this time. Those few passionate moments had embodied hours of emotional strain. The force which had seemed to be sweeping her from all moorings had caused her to struggle violently, both mentally and physically, to retain her own individuality, to prevent it from being submerged in his. His lips on hers would have been sheer physical pain, unbearable, overpowering. . . . Afterward, a numbness fell upon her mind. She felt too desperately tired to attempt coherent thought. This volcano

upon which, nowadays, they lived, must take its course! Since the moment when she had seen the shark, a lifetime of tumultuous emotions had whirled her mind and heart round like thistledown. Confused, yet subtly, gloriously elated, she slept till dawn. . . .

A fusillade of sticks and stones roused her, but she did not see Alan. And a sudden overwhelming shyness restrained her from calling to him.

But there was no trace of last night's passion about this man of a hundred moods when they met; and her self-confidence revived. While she was packing the old tin box with food, he arrived, fresh and damp from the river. He gaily deposited a large bundle at her feet, and wished her a merry Christmas.

With surprise, she uncovered a cunningly contrived hammock made from tree-fiber, aeroplane canvas, and aërial! As this was exactly what she had often wanted upon hot afternoons, her pleasure was unbounded.

"I have nothing for you, Alan!" she regretted, with compunction.

"Oh? Well—we'll see about that!" he replied enigmatically; then hurried their departure.

They walked quickly, saying little, over the rough ground which, covered with low scrub, sloped upward on the east of their bay. Before them in their widening horizon, as they mounted higher, the pale gray of dawn intensified, becoming tinged with pearly hues of cream and pink. The cream slowly deepened to yellow, the pink, merging into soft blush-rose, spreading out ever-lengthening arms. When the high ground was reached, the glory of a luminous opal suffused the eastern sky, casting its myriad reflections into the water below, which rippled and sparkled like a dancing cloud of many-colored

jewels. Gradually, as the two silently watched, the opal screen divided, and from the heart of its treasure-cave streamed long quivering shafts of gold, as the sun slowly emerged, rising majestically to his throne of glory.

Barbara turned a face reflecting the sky's radiance to her companion, finding so much more than the light of the dawn in the eyes which lingered on hers, that she looked away again, renewing the walk.

This high ground declined gently to a long stretch of rough coral shingle and bare sand, with here and there a tiny grove of palms contrasting coolly with the glare of sea and sky. Beyond, one of the long arms of inland verdure sloped to the shore. It was a wild desolate scene of the brilliant-hued, primitive beauty which grips strangely the heart attuned to nature in her untamed moods.

Alan waved toward the water, over which occasional little clouds of iridescent colors hovered, then disappeared.

"Flying-fish!" exclaimed the girl, standing still to watch them. "Mustn't they be tantalizing to an old shark just counting on his breakfast! I think I should rather like to be a flying-fish," she added, walking on again.

"Do you imply that you live among sharks?"

Her lips tilted upward in the provoking smile he knew so well.

"Yes! Sharks which always expect their own way, the bullies!"

"Perhaps," he suggested, "fish forget how to fly; or no longer wish to, in time. What happens then?"

She looked seaward, with a tremulous little laugh.

"I suppose then, they—go the shark's way! He just swallows them up. And," she said vehemently, "I hope he gets bad indigestion!"

Alan laughed. "I don't think a shark would swallow anything likely to give him indigestion!" he said meaningly. "It wouldn't be at all what he wanted."

She did not reply; but walked on at a rapid pace, as if to crush both thought and conversation.

They paused to rest and eat, in the eastern wood, meaning to remain there during the midday heat. The shady branches stretched out over the beach were welcome to eyes dazzled by the glare without. The intoxication of the morning's beauties, their own radiant health and spirits, the strains of the wild sweet orchestra rising all around, lent enchantment to that little picnic.

Barbara had, as it were, caught at reeds during the last few weeks, but they had broken in her grasp. Onward she was madly whirling. She knew it; could not save herself; could not quench that light in his eyes, and her own foolish weakness in his proximity.

Abruptly, he went to her and took her by the shoulders, saying nothing, but gazing into her face as if searching for something he wished to learn there.

Suddenly, apprehension in her eyes deepened to horror; a cry burst from her lips; she became rigid in his hands.

With such precipitate haste did the whole incident occur that she could never afterward clearly remember how it happened that, in a flash, the face of the whole world changed. . . . She was conscious of a dark bulk, a savage face she knew well, looming suddenly up amid the trees—of a spear-arm uplifted, preparatory to hurling the weapon into the back of an unsuspecting enemy. . . .

Her man was in danger! That was her only coherent thought. Instantly she had whipped out the revolver, and, with deadly calm, raised it. . . .

A sharp report and a puff of smoke; a wild howl of pain and fear; then a stream of blood oozing from the black shoulder in front of her, as the smoke cleared away. Those were the outward impressions of which her mind was dimly aware; but they seemed unreal, of no account. She heard the spear fly wide into the tree at her side; then Babooma's running footsteps and retreating cries. . . . Croft, astounded, had barely caught a glimpse of the dark face which he had often seen covertly watching him, before it was momentarily blotted out in smoke. He started forward in hot pursuit; then, arrested by a choking cry, halted abruptly, and looked at the girl. . . .

She stood motionless: her eyes, luminous as stars, fixed upon him, her mouth a little open, the still smoking weapon lying at her feet. It had been no mild idea of causing Babooma fear which had impelled her action, but a furious, savage desire to kill! She had hurled herself to the rescue, regardless of all else.

Afterward, all power or desire to move seemed to leave her. A veil fell from before her eyes; and a brilliance streamed in, illuminating, scorching—full of such ecstasy that she stood as though transfixed, paralyzed with the wonder of it all, gazing upon him whom this brilliance had newly revealed. . . .

The breath caught in the man's throat; the blood raced madly through his veins; his eyes blazed, answering the glory of her own.

Like the Wagnerian lovers after drinking of the love potion, they stood a few feet apart, under the sun-flecked foliage of the trees, awed for a moment by the miracle. She raised her hand at last, as if inviting. . . . The spell broke.

Instantly his arms were around her. With an inarticu-

late cry, she was swept off her feet, clasped to his throbbing heart, his burning lips pressed hers, her hands clinging round his neck . . . all her individuality merged irrevocably into his, as a stream, falling through arms of rock, merges into the resistless waves of the ocean.

. . . . . .

The sun was sinking, a fiery ball in an almost violet sky, its last rays shimmering golden-red across the water, when at last the two returned to the hut on that wonderful Christmas Day. A new world greeted their eyes at every turn. Never had reef or sea or sky appeared so splendid. The superb, absolute egotism of newly-found lovers enveloped them both: no thought save of each other disturbed the shining hours. Like one still walking in a dream-world, Barbara entered the central hut, gay with its decorations. The line of golden light entering with her pierced the dusk within; and, falling upon the opposite wall, drew her eyes unconsciously that way. . . . She stopped.

Hugh's face smiled down at her, with all its old confidence!

Violently the dream-world crashed around her as she met the faithful, dog-like look she knew so well. Had he been there in flesh and blood, she could hardly have been more disconcerted. She felt as a traitor might, when meeting the unsuspicious eyes of the sovereign he has betrayed. For, however faithful she might remain in word and deed to her bond, her heart would ever be traitorous. His ring was still on her finger: it seemed to burn there, an outward sign of the world of fact with its prosaic realities, its duties, its sense of honor, its materialism, its sacrifices. . . A cold foreboding swept over her. It was as if in the midst of glorious sunshine, a thunder-

clap had sent its warning of storms not far away. . . . She sat down, propping her face upon her hands, in self-abasement—fearful, yet, behind all, exultant. . . .

Thus Alan—after going to fetch water and remaining to bathe—found her, upon his return. He set down the basins, then bent over her.

"What is the matter?"

She half drew away from his touch. Bending closer, he removed the hands from her head, and raised it back against his breast.

"What's troubling my dearest, on this day of days?"

She looked up into the ardent gray depths so close above her; then at the photograph upon the wall. His look followed hers, and quick comprehension dawned.

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "Well?"

"Don't you see?" she asked. "All this is—impossible!"

His eyes hardened a little; and he loosed her.

"You and I have gone too far, now, to draw back because of scruples, Barbara!"

"They are not scruples! It is a matter of honor." She half raised her left hand, showing the little band of diamonds.

With one swift movement he had seized the hand and ripped off the ring.

"Honor be damned, then!"

She sprang up, alarmed at his violence. He towered over her, his face blazing.

"Do shed the remnants of the parson's daughter, my dear girl! Face things squarely! You drifted into this engagement when a mere child, not realizing all it meant. As you developed, it ceased to fill your life. His nature did not satisfy yours. I saw that at once. But, until I knew your heart was free, I could do nothing—save keep

away!" He laughed bitterly. "I have wanted you and craved for your love, day after day, night after night, all these damnable months here together like—like two icebergs in the Garden of Eden! Do you think now, when I have got it, I am going to lose it again? Would he or any sane man wish it—or expect it—after all this? Don't you realize what—the world would—think—now?"

She looked puzzled over this last sentence, not having been acquainted with a malicious-minded world beyond her old horizon. But she knew the truth of every other word he uttered. Her awakened heart understood now the affectionate comradeship alone aroused by Hugh. Her whole nature yearned toward this man who had mastered it; her heart fluttered—wavered. The conscience warring against it made another dying attempt.

"I—I can't shatter a man's lifelong faith. It would be murderous——"

"Do you love me?" he interrupted, taking her firmly by the shoulders.

"Ah! you—know it," she breathed.

"Yet you would put—this—between us, with no hope of rescue?"

Loosing her abruptly, he turned and looked long at the pictured face. Then, with a stifled exclamation, he pulled it from the bamboo. Before she realized his motive, he had torn the photograph into shreds, and scattered them upon the ground.

"Alan!" she gasped, almost frightened by his vehemence. He wheeled, facing her with burning eyes.

"I'm not a lap-dog! If we get rescued, we shall, of course, go straight to Hugh and tell him the truth. But—if *not*——" He suddenly threw his arms around her,

straining her to him. "Have you realized that probability—*now*, Barbara? We may be here for ever—just you and I—where the mazes of civilization give way to Truth—where no laws exist save those of nature—no conventions!" He swept her off her feet, and his kisses burned upon her lips, her neck, her short hair. . . . Once more her life seemed to sink from her own keeping into his. . . .

He set her down at last, still clasping her to him.

"Doesn't—that—decide it all?" he murmured unsteadily. "Don't you understond that we have bigger issues to face—here—than useless scruples?"

She turned in his arms, looking into his eyes through the gathering darkness. The distant thundering surf was the only sound; and it seemed to suggest approaching storms more terrible than any she had faced before. Freeing herself a little, she pressed him from her.

"You have won your way—as usual, Alan. But—Ah! Be merciful!" As she had appealed before, so the cry came again from her unprotected heart.

That pitiful entreaty and her surrender reached where resistance might have failed. The passion in his face faded a little; and, seeing this, she pressed her advantage.

"Isn't the present joy—sufficient? You are mine and I am yours. Don't let us spoil the glory of it all!"

For a long moment there was silence in the darkening hut. . . .

Then this man, who had ever been wont to sweep aside all obstacles to his will, bent his head slowly, and kissed in turn the small hands clasped upon his breast.

"We must keep our faith in each other—whatever the future brings," he whispered. And tenderly, almost reverently, he kissed her lips.

PART THREE

DEEP CHORDS

I

A RING of stakes, lolling drunkenly to one side, encircled the hut, at a distance of about twenty yards. With a small rock for hammer, Alan was pounding them into the ground, during the hour before sunset. He had conceived the idea of building a palisade. This fired Barbara with ambitions for a garden. Every plant she admired in the forest was forthwith pulled up and planted round the hut. It usually died next day; whereupon she threw the dead root away, and cheerfully fetched another.

"At any rate," she protested, "they look pretty for a few hours. And it provides occupation."

Occupation! It was what they craved. Though neither confessed the fact to the other, both tacitly acknowledged the need. They seized on any excuse that would supply food for their thoughts, toil for their limbs, fatigue for body and mind. For, deep in the heart of each, below all the ecstasy of their joy together, lurked grim fear—not fear of each other, but fear of themselves; above all, fear of nature, of her smiling face and irrevocable laws. Resolutely, each buried the skeleton out of sight, covering it with a hundred pretty-colored reeds. But sometimes, unexpectedly, it stirred below the thick layers, stretched out its skinny arms. . . .

"I'll bring the river down here some day," the inventor of modern aircraft observed, thumping in a stake with his stone-age hammer.

"Do!" she teased, scooping a hole for a fresh root. "Invite the lagoon up to meet it."

"If a little fresh-water canal could be diverted to the hut, it would save endless labor. Why are you smiling in that vacant manner?"

"At a thought."

"Tell me. Or am I too young?"

"Supposing Aunt Mary had been wrecked here with you——"

"Oh! heaven forbid!" He turned a face of horror to where she sat upon the ground, knickerbockered legs stretched straight before her; the small face, alluring in its aureole of short curly hair, raised to watch him.

"I wonder if you would both have fallen in love?" she continued. "Propinquity, you know. Aunt Mary doesn't believe men and women can be together without——" She paused abruptly. This was a danger-mark. They were always appearing, as rocks in the calmest sea, when the tide goes out. He glanced quickly at her; then gave his stake a vicious blow.

"It took a dashed lot of 'propinquity' to make you succumb to my charms!"

"They were so well hidden!" she flashed. Whereupon, he left his work; seized her arms; and rolled her, kicking helplessly, in the sand.

"Yes," she maintained breathlessly, when she had struggled free. "I loathed you."

"You did," he agreed, twisting his finger in a little wave of hair on her neck.

The touch, with the look that accompanied it, suddenly thrilled her, banishing nonsense. She passed a

hand round his head, drawing his brown cheek down to her own.

"Alan," she murmured, "you have been a revelation. I thought you a bully, only intent upon getting your own way, regardless of everybody."

"Well?" He laughed gently. "Haven't I got it?"

"Ah, but not until it proved to be my way too."

"Merely because I realized it would be worthless otherwise. I learned that first of all the many things you taught me."

"I?"

"Yes, you." He raised her chin possessively. "Don't you think you have been a revelation, too? And hasn't the 'spirit' of the island you spoke about been a revelation to us both? It seems to me," he laughed, "the only thing to save the world from being choked by materialism is to wreck it on a desert island! Make everybody begin life afresh, back in prehistoric days."

Barbara caught at this idea. "But," she said, following the train of thought it engendered, "if all discontented people had the chance to come, wouldn't every tree be crowded?"

"Not at all. Only a handful would arrive. The majority are too peacefully asleep to realize they are being choked. Commercialism is the god they worship. Although, when there is nothing better to do, they go to church—in their best clothes."

"You are very bitter!" she exclaimed in surprise.

"One sees the perspective of things from here," he replied simply. "Look at marriages—the wretchedness of some, and the stuffiness of others! Think of the rotten motives which lead to them! I used to abhor the idea."

"You don't now?" she smiled.

"Well——" His answer was lost in her hair. . "But

none of the 'obey' nonsense! We shall prune the marriage service very carefully."

She raised her head with a little gasp. "*You* say that? Why—I used to imagine you a 'Petruchio'!"

"I've thought a devil of a lot, here," he said warmly. "I should beat a wife who obeyed me. It would awaken all my most brutal tendencies. Besides, it is absurd. The whole realm of nature is dual—male and female. To make one subservient to the other is ridiculous. Comradeship! That's the only foundation. When it is properly understood, the world will be more fit to live in. It's coming. But there's a lot of jealousy and misunderstanding to get rid of, yet."

Barbara was too much astonished to reply for a moment. To her, this man had ever been full of surprises; but she had spoken the truth when she had called him a revelation. For, during the two months since Christmas, he had been so at every turn. Not until love opened her own eyes; until she knew the meaning of passion herself, and understood the tempestuous force of his, did she realize the strain under which he had been living. Since Christmas night the nature she had thought arrogant had revealed a thousand wonderful mysteries. As a tree, cold and hidden in the snows and frosts of winter, responds to the glory of spring, so he had opened in the glory of their love.

"But," he went on, with a change of tone, "it doesn't appear as if a priest and ten bridesmaids are going to drop from heaven for our wedding!"

She drew away from him, and clasped her arms round her raised knees. Mountains, dark and threatening to those whose way lies across them, are little heeded when shrouded in mist, below which the sun shines. But now

and then a jagged peak thrusts through; and, with the journey's progress, more appear behind. . . . Generally, these frequent peaks were instinctively shunned; but to-day Alan went on recklessly.

"After all, marriage was made for man, like all other conventions. We are not their slaves. What do forms and ceremonies matter—here? They are often tosh. A pauper marries an heiress, and vows to endow her with all his worldly goods! If he did, he would have to take the clothes off his back and go stark naked. You and I would vow to forsake all others, when there is nobody here to forsake. You would hardly want to elope with Babooma? If you did, I should soon catch you. That's another point: we couldn't separate if we wanted to! So what would be the good of a wedding? Of vows we couldn't possibly break?"

She sprang to her feet, breathing quickly.

"Alan! What are you saying? Don't! Don't!"

"Why not?" he asked, getting up too. "We can't remain blindfolded for ever."

The mists fell from a huge mountain-peak, and the color ebbed from the girl's face.

"Ah!" she murmured, clasping her hands. "Isn't the present—perfect? Don't precipitate——"

He took her by the shoulders, forcing her to face him. "We are only human," he said, in a low voice; "and, Barbara—I want my wife!"

She pressed her clenched hands against him, hiding her head upon them. "Oh, not yet! Don't think me obtuse, Alan. I have thought, too, and—and feared——"

"What have you feared?"

She did not reply for a moment; he waited, motionless.

When every accustomed bulwark of life has been

demolished, the foundations of a fresh building are laid necessarily in a troubled soil composed of struggle, temptation, agonies of uncertainty. But to continue postponing the new building only causes the fragments of the old to rot more as the days slip by. To each, situated as they were, the problem confronting them loomed even larger. Facts out here assumed a vastly different nature from that which they wore in civilization. There, they were clothed in a hundred hues; here they were crude, bare. . . . The undeveloped girl, blindly groping after the "hidden want" in a materialistic environment, had gone for ever. As the ripened corn sprung from its buried seed, the woman, sublime in her love, glories in the growing courage of the inner self she had tried to stifle, had arisen.

"We have found the true keynote here," she murmured brokenly at last, "and we must keep it tuned aright. I wouldn't, for the world, spoil the beauty of everything."

"You couldn't—ever," he whispered into her hair. "But love is a terrific force which can't be turned on and off like hot water; or compressed into narrow preconceived channels."

He suddenly threw his arms round her and strained her to him. "Barbara! why should we be done out of our rights? We've been chucked out of the world; stripped of everything that made life worth living. But now we have discovered the greatest treasure of all. Are we to give that up because of—scruples? By God!" with sudden anger he loosed her, clenching his hands, "I won't! I'm damned if I'll agree to that! It isn't fair. You say I always get my way. Well—some time——"

She met calmly the passion and threat in his eyes. These untamed forces no longer alarmed her, as they would have done six months ago.

"Alan!" she protested, holding out her hand. He ignored it, gazing still upon the peculiar radiance of her face. She went to him, lifting both hands to his shoulders, her lips tremulous. "There is more to be considered . . . not—not only ourselves. . . . My darling! don't you realize we are man and woman, and——" Her flushed face sank on his breast. "Don't you see?" she whispered. "Others! Not—'scruples.'"

A long silence succeeded her broken words. His arms closed around her again, and again he hid his face in her hair.

Counting odds had never been Croft's way. In ancient days, had he proved himself beloved by the woman of his desire, he would have caught her to his saddle and ridden away at a gallop. Perhaps it was the first time in his life that, deliberately, he stood aside, placing a decision, which vitally affected him, in the hands of another.

He raised his head at last; and as he pulled her hands down into his own his face looked strangely drawn.

"God help us both, Barbara!" he muttered huskily. "For we are in the very hell of a position." There was a strange blending of fear and adoration in the eyes of both, while they looked upon each other. "But I—I swear I'll—I'll never force you to—anything. Always remember that. And, for heaven's sake, don't—let me forget! I'm so damned human," he added, with naïve pathos.

For the first time since she knew him, she heard a lack of confidence in his tone. Conscious of those forces of nature against which they were but puppets, all the woman in her rose to meet him.

"We can never lose faith in each other, Alan. That will help us. But——" she looked at the dearly loved

figure. For one illuminating instant, all that marriage would mean between them flashed into her heart, awakening the mother dormant within her. "Ah! But it's going to be hard—hard—hard!"

The cry burst, involuntarily, from her lips. All the love and longing which inspired it shone in the gaze which seemed to envelop him as a glowing fire. . . For a space he stood silent, lost with her in a world which neither had dreamed of before. Then he stepped forward with a muttered ejaculation, and they clung together as they had clung on their first night on the island: two derelict beings swept over the world's edge. . . .

"Go in," he whispered tremulously, at last. "I can't come to supper to-night. I must go away alone for a bit . . . and think. . . . You've opened a new world to me to-night."

He kissed her with lingering gentleness, and turned away toward the shore.

Barbara walked slowly into the hut. But to her, also, food seemed impossible just then. That moment's illumination had opened up a new world for her, too—a world which, it seemed, she was never to enter! . . . With a little sobbing breath, she went into the sleeping-hut, and threw herself face downward on her bed. . . .

For a long time neither alluded to this conversation. A new chord had been struck between them, too deep for idle talk. A subtler difference, a shade more of seriousness, came into their relations. The shadow cast by the mountain-peaks enveloped them. Try as they would, they could never quite free themselves from it.

Distractions of any sort became urgent; but to find them, in this small island, was no easy matter. However, Alan, after mentally viewing the land, took what frail

material there was and wove it into ropes of support. That the ropes might break, he could not foresee.

He turned once more, in pathetic hope, to the natives.

During the months since their first visit to the settlement, he had come to occupy the unique position of a semi-divine Overlord. His orders, issued at first in the spirit of bluff, were obeyed. This at first surprised, then amused, him. After a time, it afforded him intense interest. Twice since Christmas he and Barbara had walked across to the south, descending upon the tribe with godlike abruptness. Each time, Chimabahoi hastened to show him the results of the various celestial messages he had delivered. His orders regarding cleanliness were receiving extraordinary consideration; irrigation work had been undertaken. Now, he plunged with new zest into this novel training of prehistoric minds. He ordered the cultivation of *taro* to be reinstituted; tapestry-weaving from reeds to be revived. All this, originating from fear, not inclination, slowly awakened the natives' interest, which, increasing, caused much of their lethargy to vanish.

Within a few weeks, the last signs of a threatening new epidemic of sickness vanished, and the settlement became more wholesome. This being attributed to the white man's magic, their fear blended into a crude awesome affection, which struck Alan as pathetic. Gradually his visits became hailed even with delight. For, in matters of dispute, Chimabahoi appealed to him, relying more and more on his counsel. And, swayed by none of the opposing elements, he dealt with a severe justness, yet humaneness, which they found both novel and attractive. Withal, he braced them, stimulating their latent powers, much in the same way in which he had stimulated Barbara, by the mere force of his own vitality.

Her own interest in these people grew apace. From Alan she learned some of the dialect, very soon being able to speak a little herself. Sometimes she brought the children odd bits of ribbon or lace, which produced an excited uproar. Weeks later, she used to see these scraps adorning some woman's dark form, with ludicrous incongruity.

But, among these "children of nature," as among other children, not of nature but of civilized education, there existed under-currents of strife, ambition, ill-feeling. These were responsible for a division of which Croft soon became aware. The more savage factions waxed impatient for Babooma to be their chief. Only the superstitious awe in which a chief is held saved Chimabahoi from being despatched unceremoniously to the spirits of his murdered sons. The result of that would have been civil war, and deadly peril for the two white people. For Babooma and his friends were not partial to these strange newcomers who forced them to work and frustrated their savage tendencies. Croft knew well the risky ground on which he trod. For reasons of strategy, therefore, he forbore, save for a drastic warning, to take any steps in retaliation for Christmas Day's attempt upon his life. "Ball-devils" from the white woman, in swift retribution for what he had contemplated, had frightened Babooma enough for the present. His black face was seldom seen, nowadays, far from the settlement.

Roowa and Meamaa, since their child's recovery, had regarded the "white chief" with little less than worship. And this face gave Alan the idea wherewith to cause distraction in the increasing difficulty of the life he and Barbara now led. It was, both knew, but catching at straws; yet, eagerly, such frail aids were welcomed.

After a short consultation with Chimabahoi, Roowa was commanded to take up his residence in the north, to help the "white chief" in work upon the land, while Meamaa served his "wife."

The ruined huts were strictly *tabu,* haunted by the spirits of those slain there. Roowa, proudly radiant, began to build a new hut, to which Meamaa and his two children could be fetched.

"Meamaa my only woman," he told Croft one day. "But I am content. Good cook, and I like her."

"That is well," Croft replied seriously, wondering if this native differed much from many of his own countrymen in this respect.

"But many men not content! Our women are few. Babooma's woman killed by white men's ball-devils. Babooma not content!" His eyes rolled deliberately in the direction of Barbara not far off, then back to Croft. The white man made no reply. But a new danger reared its menacing head. . . .

Within a short time smoke arose from Meamaa's cooking; and two small black figures danced, like imps, among the palms.

II

Thus a new phase opened, and, for some months, these frail aids showed a deceptive strength.

Croft occupied almost feverishly every minute. With Roowa's help and native implements, he managed to divert the course of a small stream from the river to the lagoon, past his hut; thus providing fresh water at their door, and an ornamental rivulet in their enclosure. He also started irrigation and cultivation on a small scale, clearing away much scrub behind the ruined huts, with the idea of planting *taro.*

Barbara, when she was not helping him, continued her experiments in gardening, gradually inducing a few ferns, pau-pau, and other plants to take root. Their palisade enclosed a small clump of palms, to which she slung the hammock. Alan roughly constructed a little canoe in which they could paddle about the lagoon; while Meamaa contributed an absorbing new edition of the book of human nature.

Truly, if "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin," a thread of gossip binds it from pole to pole! The English girl discovered that a civilized country parish and a far-off native settlement are not, after all, so far apart. Their differences, like their color, are often but skin-deep. When once Meamaa became accustomed to this semi-human white woman, she regaled her with the history of every member of the tribe. This was dished up with a choice array of crude facts and cruder embellishments which, a year before, would have made her cheeks burn.

"I wish," she remarked to Alan one day, "we could teach them English."

He rolled his eyes up in imitation of Roowa. "She wants to start a Mission!" he exclaimed.

"Not at all. I think I shall try. It would be interesting."

The result of this effort was far-reaching. The news of the gods' own language being imparted spread like smoke to the south. One day Barbara found six awe-struck women and several children squatting beside Meamaa to hear the celestial words. With some amusement she gave a lesson. That was but a prelude. Nearly every evening parties of men and women arrived at Roowa's hut, sending him to implore the "white chief's" wife to speak to them in the strange tongue. Alan frequently

found himself alone and supperless. Therefore, manlike, he "put his foot down," suggesting fixed days for this instruction.

So it came to pass that, on certain evenings of the week, practically the entire tribe panted northward, squatting on the coral beach, listening spell-bound. Their keenness and quickness to learn were extraordinary. In an incredibly short time some of them had acquired quite a smattering of English.

Alan joined in the rôle of teacher in a somewhat novel fashion. With the British Royal Family, past and present, representing his gods, England their Olympus, he thrilled his hearers to the bone with long histories of his native land. Stories of its battles especially pleased them—the war against their own white enemies being a never-failing joy. Names of royalty, eminent soldiers or sailors, gradually became household words. But their sense of time remained vague. Kitchener and William the Conqueror presumably shook hands; while Nelson took part in the Battle of Jutland. To them it remained incredible that such gods could die and be superseded. Neither could they realize that those "other worlds" were but strange lands in their own, not different planets in the blue skies above. For reasons of his own, Alan forbore to press any of these points.

"I wonder," suggested Barbara, when they strolled together one night, "if we ought to teach them Christianity."

Alan looked down, smiling at these lingering instincts of the parson's daughter; but shook his head.

"If they learn gentleness, kindness and cleanliness, don't you think they are acquiring the spirit of it?" he asked. "These will permeate, paving the way, if you

think it necessary to teach them Christian creeds later. But don't upset their old faiths yet—they are not ready. It's always a dangerous thing. If it's hurried, it is fatal."

She thrust her arm through his. "You're awfully wise, Alan mine! You seem to know just how to manage the natives. Why is it, I wonder?"

"Because I care for them. You can usually understand those you love, if you try. See how well I manage you!"

She pinched his hand. "You don't. It's just the reverse! You have become like a lamb since—Christmas."

"A wolf in lamb's clothing, probably."

She laughed; then felt his arm. "D'you know, you're getting thin, Alan."

"Hard work."

"I have noticed it in your face, too. You mustn't work so incessantly—there's no need."

"Isn't there? Ah, Barbara! I think there is."

She looked up quickly; but he had turned his face seaward; only the grim set of his mouth was visible. The woman in her thrilled to him, for she understood. Clasping his arm tightly, she laid her face against it.

"Dear!" she murmured.

"We have been here nearly a year," was his only response.

"I know."

They walked on in silence a while, passing near Roowa's hut. Just outside the entrance the native and his wife sat close together, the youngest child asleep in the man's arms, both too much absorbed in low-toned conversation to notice their approach. The natives' love may be little above that of an animal for its mate; but it contents them.

Barbara's clasp tightened, as these two outcasts from all laws looked upon the group.

"They are very happy. Alan, I often watch them."

"So do I—my God!"

She glanced up in surprise at the passionate tone in his voice.

"I sometimes wish I had never brought them here," he continued. She was silent a moment; then drew his hand swiftly up to her face. With her lips against it, she whispered, so low that he had to bend down to catch her words:

"Do you ever look at—their little ones—and think—supposing—if—only——?"

"Barbara! I do."

He turned and drew her into his arms. "I have thought of it *all*—over and over again! I think of nothing else."

The relief of speaking, for once, about the theme which lay heavy upon their hearts caused discretion to be thrown to the winds. "It haunts me!" she cried passionately, clinging to him. "It haunts me day and night. I can't bear to see them. I've tried——"

"And I, by heaven!"

Loosing her abruptly, he threw himself down upon the rock outside the hut and bowed his head in his hands. What was passing through his mind she could only surmise by the chaos of emotion which, now the barriers were down, surged through her own. All these weeks both had struggled to forget the problems menacing them. But the very straws at which they had caught proved to be, so to speak, serpents in disguise. For nature, crude and unattended, ruled this island. By her inexorable laws these primitive people were guided, unabashed, in all good faith. And among these subtle forces working around them, undermining the very ground beneath their

feet, the two were flung together in a solitude, a familiarity, so maddening yet so entrancing, that their senses were inflamed at every turn. Escape was impossible. Wherever they moved they were confronted with their own rising passion. Regarded as man and wife, they shrank now from visiting the settlement together. Throughout the days each constantly surprised the other's furtive, hungry, troubled regard. Conversation became often strained, demonstrativeness between them a danger. Throughout the night each lay listening to the other's movements and breathing, through the frail bamboo partition. No longer could they shout careless badinage, hold midnight talks. . . . But, since the building of the palisade, neither had dared put into words the fear rising ever higher in their hearts.

He uncovered his face at last, and looked up at her, a grim defiance in his eyes.

"We can't go on like this. It's damnable! Barbara —come here."

Hesitating a little, not understanding the unusual expression of his face, she went toward the hand he held out. He caught her roughly by the arm, pulling her down to her knees at his side, gazing into her eyes for several seconds without speaking—searching, proving her in some inexplicable manner.

"How much do you love me?" he demanded, at last.

She looked startled at his peremptory tone. "Why do you ask such questions?" But she collapsed against him. "With my very life," she whispered passionately. "I should die if I lost you now."

He strained her close, pressing hot lips to hers. "How far would you go with me? How far?" he muttered eagerly.

"To eternity!" she murmured, half faint with the sudden passion sweeping them both away. The arms holding her were trembling.

"If we never get rescued? How far then? How far, Barbara?"

Only a little stifled gasp answered him.

All the soft night odors of the forest were stealing down to the beach, blending with the pungent smell of hot earth, mingling with the languorous murmur of the tide. Close in his arms, a weak craving to surrender, to capitulate before the forces arrayed against them both, swept over her. It was so easy to let all else go. . . . She turned, laying her head back a little, thrilling to the touch of his lips upon her throat. . . . Twice she opened her own lips, but no words would come; only her eyes told him that which caused his senses to reel. His grip tightened, so that he hurt her; but the pain was an exquisite joy.

The animal in man, longing fiercely for its mate, had been let loose in Alan, stronger for all these months of temptation and repression. The future at this moment lay in his hands;—and he knew it, exulted in the knowledge. . . .

Half unconsciously he rose to his feet, lifting her, unresisting, with him. Her warm young body lay acquiescent, at his mercy. He took a step toward the hut; cast one dazed look round the darkening beach——

From Roowa's dwelling the faint cry of a child came to them, wafted upon the soft night breeze down the bay. . . .

The girl heard it, and raised her head. The man heard it, and caught his breath. Their eyes met.

She slipped from his arms with a long quivering sigh.

They stood facing each other, struggling with the turbulence of their emotion.

"'Reverberations'! Do you—remember?" she whispered, at last.

He made no reply, continuing to gaze upon her face, and she went on speaking, almost to herself, standing before him with the darkness closing around her.

"'The vast harmony in which each note has unlimited effect upon every other note.' You taught me that. Do you remember? Life's a harmony, you said. We—we are forgetting."

He turned away and walked to the lagoon, standing there for several minutes, his back toward her, his hands covering his face. When he returned, he had, she could see, regained his self-control. Coming close, he laid his hands upon her shoulders.

"Are we perhaps troubling over what may never happen? Barbara—there might be no—no 'reverberations.' There are not, always."

She smiled at him, a smile that was almost maternal. "That's true. But——" She broke off, a little catch in her breath, her eyes dwelling dreamily upon the face above her own, as if picturing something far off and passing beautiful. . . . "But it wouldn't be fair," she muttered to herself.

A flush mounted to his cheek in meeting and interpreting the look which, momentarily, his own eyes reflected.

"The thought of you troubles me most," he owned. "The question of 'fairness' is an open one. This is a grand free life for anybody who—knows no other. The world might think it unfair. But the world doesn't count with us. We are savages now. But you—you! Oh, my darling! . . . Nature is so hard on women."

Her face was hidden on his breast. He went on diffidently, whispering into the dark hair.

"The question of 'reverberations' shall be yours entirely. Do you understand? If you decide not to face it all——"

"Ah! no, no, no!" She raised her head quickly. "Alan, I love you for that. But I won't shirk! Don't ever think I mean *that*." She turned her luminous eyes seaward. "Imagine a little home with just you and me and—a dear little nest all our own. . . . Oh! it's cruel, cruel!" Passionately she gripped his shoulders. "I long for it all—I ache inside. Sometimes I dream we have it together; and then—then I wake up——"

"But we can have it, here, now," he interrupted eagerly. "Only the forms would be absent; the spirit would be there. Surely, in these circumstances, we can make our own laws?" He took her clinging hands in his. "Barbara, have you thought over the matter? Faced it squarely? Or are you viewing it from the—the Darbury standpoint?"

"My brain has gone round and round like a whirlpool for months! I don't know what I think."

"Well, think this," he said gently: "Marriage laws and forms vary with every creed, and in every country, to suit temperament or—environment. And, everywhere, certain conventions are necessary. For God's sake, don't imagine I'm an advocate of loose morality! But you and I are cast off from all rules save those of our own making. Have you considered that? These natives—or Indians, Turks, Christians—all have some ideal which they embody in certain marriage rites and laws."

She hung upon his words, clasping tightly the hands holding her own. "Yes?" she breathed, when he paused.

"Well—we are adrift from every one which applies to us. We *can't* obey them in the letter. We only have them in our hearts."

"You mean," she whispered, "you think it would be right to form our own—marriage rites?"

"I do. Before God, Barbara, I do. To me, our wedding would be as sacred and lawful here, with the sea for music, the birds for witness, as in a crowded church. I want you always to remember that."

The waves echoed faintly upon the shore; the wind stirred the palm-leaves in their enclosure; otherwise the whole world seemed waiting, in a stillness like death, for her reply.

"I believe you, Alan," she murmured at last. "I had not thought of it at all in this light. It would be the same to me, in my heart. But—should we be right? Suppose—afterward—we were rescued?"

"Well? Then we should at once obey the letter. Here we can obey the spirit. But isn't that the greater? In the world it is the reverse, often. The spirit is violated."

"Suppose," she began again, with a shudder, "only one of us were rescued?"

"Don't conjure up imaginary horrors."

She drew away, looking around the bay with the same pathetic helplessness that had struck him so poignantly on Christmas Eve.

"Oh!" she muttered, "it is a terrible problem! If only there were somebody outside it all, to help! I am so afraid our very love may guide us—wrongly."

"No," he said quickly. "It won't, because it is love—not that other word beginning with the same letter. Besides, it is the motive of the heart which counts, in all problems."

She glanced up. The words brought a swift memory across her mind of the last tennis party in her old life; of Mrs. Field, who never lightly condemned.

"If I had a terrible problem to decide I should come to you," she had said. But not even Mrs. Field could decide in this matter, were she here.

A great loneliness, in the midst of all her love, descended on the girl. For the first time she fully realized the terrible isolation of each soul when confronted with huge issues. She turned away, covering her face with her hands.

"What can we do? What can we do?" The words came brokenly, pathetically, to the other outcast from all laws. He was conscious to-night, more than ever before, of their growing, dominant need of each other. Had he striven in his old arrogance she would not, he knew, have resisted his appeal. But the great keynote was tuning his nature as well as hers. All the chivalry latent in his being rose to his heart, casting out passion. With infinite delicacy he went to her and put his arms about her.

"We are down among the deep chords together, now," he whispered. "But together—always together."

With a choking cry she turned and flung herself upon his breast, clinging to him, the only human bulwark of her life.

"I can't decide yet. Oh! I can't—decide; I can't decide——" And she burst into a passion of tears.

III

No shadowy mountain-peaks, but hard bare facts now stared them in the face. Down at the bedrock of nature, among elementals, shorn of both the encrusting fetters and the transfiguring embellishments of civiliza-

tion, love had seized them in a grip that was violent, relentless.

They had caught at straws, and the straws had broken; allowed the orchestra rising all around to draw their hearts to its only keynote; and now the deep chords were vibrating—dominant, insistent. . . .

The man, with the divine instinct of understanding now awakened, realized acutely all that the girl was suffering. He held her quivering form close, saying nothing. There was nothing he could say. Her own soul must now fight out this battle between the old instincts of a lifetime and those of a world beyond the reach of civilized rule.

Presently, when she grew calmer, he lifted her bodily and carried her into the hut. He placed her upon her bed; then knelt for a moment, and laid his cheek to hers.

"The decision lies in your hands," he whispered. "Come and tell me when you know."

Then he rose to his feet, lingering beside her for a time, a world of almost maternal tenderness in his steady regard. But she made no reply. With a little gesture of helplessness, he turned, and walked back to the lagoon.

Here, often now, he spent half the night, alone with the torments of his body and mind. Here, with clenched hands, beads of perspiration on his face, he wrestled with the powers arrayed against him. Here, to the music of the distant surf, the brute and the divine—so subtly mingled in man—waged their eternal war. Sometimes one triumphed; sometimes the other. If a dozen times he halted in his restless pacing, to turn to the dark little hut so damnably near, so utterly at his mercy . . . so pathetically alone—a dozen times he threw himself down upon the sand, and gripped his head with shaking fingers, shutting out the sight of hut, and sea, and sky. . . .

Croft, in old days, could not have been called a strongly-sexed man. All the vitality of his nature went into other channels. Now, when, for the first time, passion had come to him, it found him bereft of all those other outlets to his abundant energy. It shook him with fierce intensity. In the past, his whole concentration, every ounce of brain and strength, had been given to his work and inventions. Now the same splendid force, welling up and overflowing, was concentrated upon woman—a channel half-closed against him. Being half-closed caused more torture than if it had been entirely shut and barred.

Fate—God—whatever the Unseen Power was called—had hurled them, man and woman, together in this isolation. Why, by all that was sacred, should they resist the law underlying His creation? Must His primal laws be set aside because those made by man, now mere chimeras, were absent? It was absurd, quixotic, unnecessary.

But beneath the velvet glove of nature lies the iron hand; behind her smiling face sits grim severity. These, more than any scruples, caused him to pause. He who had ever scorned obstacles, now faced them appalled. He who had never known fear, was now afraid. . . .

These stupendous issues affected the woman he loved far more than they could ever affect man. Alan, who used to carve out his own career regardless of woman, now began, figuratively, to abase himself before her. He had fully intended, upon finding the sanctuary of Barbara's heart free, to win his way there. He set himself to the task in his own manner, and he succeeded. But, with the success, came the realization of the flavor of dead ashes, should his victory be violated. Following that, came the great discovery that true love lies in giving, not in taking—that this was fact, not platitude. . . .

He who had ever seized what he desired, now stood aside and waited.

Barbara must decide. To that, amid the turmoil of his spirit, he clung. There must never be coercion; she was no weakling. Not until she saw the path clear before her would she move an inch: that he knew well.

But she would never shirk. Sitting alone in the darkness after leaving her, he clasped his arms round his knees and buried his face upon them, the blood tingling in his veins at the vision of the woman's heights to which she might climb. There would be no drawing back, no compromise. Her surrender would be complete. But it would never be a surrender from weakness. It would be a glorious conquest—a conquest over all that was base and unworthy, all that was surface and mere symbol. Whichever way lay the decision, it would mean the triumph of her truest self. . . .

No sign came from the hut. Within its darkness, inert, head buried in her outstretched arms, lay the arbiter of his fate and her own. In a great and awful loneliness of soul, such as she had never imagined possible, she faced the greatest question woman can be called upon to answer. The mountains were quite close now; but she approached them without shrinking, only desirous of finding the right path across to her Beloved. She did not blind herself. She had contemplated marriage before, aware of all it meant to a woman in civilization. Now she contemplated it shorn of all but nature's own sublimely terrible forces; contemplated the years ahead, with the possibility of other lives besides their own. . . . Reverberations! Truly, when one irrevocable chord is struck, the reverberations roll on and on, echoing all around, so that God's whole Harmony may be marred or perfected. Can one always tell which it will be?

One short year, though it may develop a nature beyond recognition, does not wipe out the very foundations upon which a human being has been reared. Love and passion for her man, the aching desire to become his wife—as she would now have become in ordinary circumstances—might have triumphed over all fear and doubt, had they not clashed with that inborn moral sense—far removed from prudery—which is one of the keenest instincts in true womanhood. Just because she desired so much to surrender, she hesitated. Not for the world, as he had said, would she have stained the beauty of their love, by giving way, until she had become convinced herself. She believed in the genuineness of his convictions, but they must become her own, too. . . .

Both met next day, heavy-eyed from a sleepless night; but each tacitly forbore to allude to the fact. They spoke little, making but a pretense at breakfast. Afterward, Alan fetched his native bow and arrows.

"I may not be back until evening," he said. "You will be all right?"

"Quite."

There was a relief in her tone which he noticed and understood. He hesitated; but she did not look up. For the first time since Christmas they had omitted their morning kiss. And now something restrained him from taking the wistful little face in his hands, much as he longed to do so. He turned and strode off up the bay.

The omission was significant. They had struck a chord too deep ever to return to the delightful camaraderie of the past. Demonstrativeness held a hidden menace behind all its charm. A new wall, vastly different from the old one, yet no less baffling, formed again between them. Once more, each intuitively hid behind reserve,

yet hung upon the other's slightest action. Once more, only surface topics were allowed admittance. Once more, Alan spent long hours away. . . .

Love and youth! Warm, tender womanhood; manhood in its prime! The very air with its languorous softness, the radiant beauty all around, every familiarity of their life together, conspired to fan their senses to white heat. With the passing of the weeks, the spell worked more subtly, more surely, through their entire being. . . .

One day, before their second Christmas, Meamaa fell sick. Barbara, who of late had shunned too much contact with that happy family, fetched Laalo and his sister to play in the enclosure. Children's merry laughter echoed around their home; and Alan, instead of going off as usual, stayed to play with them.

Barbara watched him, all her heart shining in her eyes. There was nobody to put the fear of *tabu* into Laalo's frizzy head. The "great white chief" told him marvelous stories of animals never seen upon their island. He became a wonderful horse galloping round the hut, with Laalo upon his back; then a roaring lion, that roared most terribly. There were swings in the hammock, and games of which the little natives had never heard.

And all the time, while joining in their play, Barbara watched her man. Often, too, she found him watching her. . . . How happy these little ones were in their life of freedom, knowing no other. . . . The conventions of previous years seemed very remote now, very unreal. . . . His point of view was, surely, mere common sense? . . . As the day wore on, she fell more and more silent, a terrible aching hunger in her heart. . . . Must their two natures age here in barren purposelessness? Never be

fulfilled? Why? Because far-off rules of society, which could not reach them, would be broken? How trivial such things seemed here, where the world was still in its beginning. . . .

In the evening, the tiny girl, tired after the excitement of the day, grew sleepy and fretful. Alan stopped an uproarious game, sat down upon a rock, and lifted her in his arms. She lay there contentedly, her little black head nestled in his shoulder.

A pain that, in its poignancy, was almost physical, gripped Barbara's heart. Great tears welled up suddenly and ran down her cheeks. Moved by an irresistible impulse, she darted forward and snatched the child from him. "No, no, no! I can't bear—that! Let them go home. . . . It is time they went home. . . ."

For a moment he gazed at her, bereft of speech. Then he rose, and called Laalo.

"I will take them home," he said quietly.

When he returned, she had sunk upon the rock he had vacated. With eyes tragic in their intentness, she watched him approach. He came close to her. With one of his old swift movements he raised her chin with his hand, so that she met the penetration of his gaze.

"Barbara!" he muttered, "this will drive us mad. We are human, not gods."

She drew away, hiding her face in her hands. The very touch of his fingers sent an electric current racing through her veins. They seemed, nowadays, to live in some magnetic field, where the slightest, most unexpected movement set all the electricity in motion. To continue like this was becoming daily more impossible.

Presently she rose, not daring to speak, and turned from him into the hut.

"Together, always together," Alan had said. But therein lay the bitterness: it could not be borne together. There are some natures which rejoice in talk, talk, ceaseless talk. That brings, in a way, its own relief. But with these two, in their inherent reserve, such relief was impossible. Each had to struggle alone. Every moment of contact became a danger.

A new fear assailed Barbara. If she could not decide as he wished, what might be the result? Would the situation become so intolerable that their love would suffer? Could love be turned into that other word, or even to hatred, if unnaturally thwarted? Even as it would if violated?

Blindly, bewildered, she groped her way, step by step, through this maze of uncertainty. The day with the native children had been a revelation. Never before had she realized the passion of longing which possessed her. . . . And by her own self-revelation she judged the suffering of the man waiting for her decision. The claims of another's need grew insistent, dominating. . . . More and more did the life of previous years seem pale and unreal. . . . The fears for the future, the burden of its responsibilities, grew fainter, assumed new aspects. . . .

There came a night when Alan, after being away all day, returned moody, irritable, impatient of all the trivial subjects with which she endeavored to make conversation.

"Have you been working in the plantation?" she asked, after several unsuccessful attempts during supper.

"No."

He ate a banana, and threw away the skin. "What's the good of it all?" he asked impatiently. "It will lead nowhere."

"It's occupation," she faltered.

"Occupation? Yes. Occupation for the sake of occupation! Is that all life is to be worth? My God! What an outlook!"

Pushing away the shell which served him for plate, he clasped his arms round his knees, gazing gloomily over the lagoon.

This was another of Barbara's fears. How long would the limited interests of the island, shorn of a deeper outlet, suffice for a man of his temperament?

"You are doing a lot of good among the natives," she suggested, feeble though she knew the remark to be.

"Good?" He gave an impatient laugh. "Lord! Don't credit me with the instincts of a missionary! That's only 'occupation.' One hour, if we left this place, and they would forget it all."

He got up, thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets, then drawing them quickly out again. "Not even a smoke!" With sudden violence he kicked a half-empty cocoanut out of his way. "Drink—dope—anything for—'occupation'!"

This bitterness, this dreary desolation of voice and mien, so unlike the old Alan of indomitable resource and optimism, cut Barbara to the heart. For she understood.

"Alan! Alan!" she cried, stretching out a hand.

But he shook his head. "No. I can't—I—daren't. I'm only fit for the devil to-night."

She rose, her lips trembling, and went toward him.

"Don't! Alan, don't shut me out! I—understand—"

"Understand? You can't, or——" Suddenly he seized her, almost viciously, dragging her up against him. With shaking hands he pressed back her head, and laid his hot lips upon her neck.

"I—I'll—force you to give in—one day——" he muttered thickly.

She did not struggle; but she trembled violently in his grasp. For a long moment his eyes burned into hers. But, among the answering passion they saw there, lay the purity which was the very essence of her being. . . .

As abruptly as he had seized her, he let her go again.

"I—I told you I was only fit for the devil to-night," he said huskily. "Let me be . . . for God's sake, let me be. . . ."

She turned, quivering in every limb, and ran into the hut.

Brought up in an atmosphere of orthodox forms of prayer, Barbara in the old life had never felt the reality or the need of it. But to-night, tossing to and fro upon her bed, the sudden awful craving of a helpless being for some Guiding Hand came upon her with the decision, slowly but surely, forming in her heart—the desperate desire, as it were, for sanction, understanding.

Sitting up, she gazed out through the aperture over the moonlit water and reef, in a very agony of mute supplication, her hands clasped upon her breast. Must her soul go through to the very end, unaided? Was there nobody to see, to know, to help? . . . Throwing herself on her knees beside the bed, she fell forward on her outstretched arms, in a paroxysm of uncontrolled weeping. Unconscious of any coherent petitions, her overcharged heart emptied itself of all its doubts and fears and resolves.

For hours she lay there, deaf and blind to all around, alone with her God. . . .

And gradually a great peace stole over her spirit. Imperceptibly, the last mountain rolled slowly away. As one tired out after long, victorious warfare, she lay,

motionless, the moonlight falling through the little window upon her white-robed figure. . . .

After a time she rose and looked once more upon the waves she loved so well, a wondrous shining in her eyes. And all the perfumed beauty of the night blended in the tender, passionate craving to be with him who, also, had striven, and suffered, and conquered.

Slipping on her old Japanese wrapper, she passed noiselessly out of her room. He had, she knew, not gone in to bed.

Opening the door of the hut, she stepped into the little garden, the wind lightly fluttering her wide sleeves, and hurried down to the shore. She scanned the moonlit scene eagerly; but there was no sign of the figure she sought.

Moved by some instinct, she turned, stumbling over the rough ground, and ascended the eastern slopes, where they had watched the dawn on that Christmas Day nearly a year ago.

IV

The waning moon showed dawn to be not far off. The frayed ends of Barbara's blue wrapper flapped wildly about her form, as she hurried up the rising ground. She raised her face to meet the wind, feeling a sensuous delight in its cool fresh touch upon her skin, its wanton games among her short hair. It seemed to stir some inner reciprocal chord of her nature, causing her to feel, after these months of struggle, a sense of exhilaration, a unity with the winds and waves and all the great free elements of life.

At the summit a group of rough boulders, moss-covered, commanded a long view over the eastern shore of the island, while forming a shelter from the wind. The

girl approached them; then, at a sudden soft sound, stood still, her heart beating rapidly. Noiselessly rounding them, she discovered the man she sought stretched upon the ground, his head thrown back upon clasped arms, his eyes dreaming far away over the softly outlined scene below.

For a moment she fingered the folds of her thin garment, watching him. Then the wind fluttered one of her loose sleeves; and his gaze flashed back from far distances. Turning his head, he saw the figure standing, motionless, by his side.

"Barbara!" he cried, springing to his feet. He gripped the nearest boulder. "What is the matter? What are you doing here?"

But all words of explanation vanished from her mind. She stood perfectly still, her hands pressed upon the garment at her breast, the wind waving her cloudy hair, her lips a little parted, her blue eyes darkly shining in the faint light. During that moment she gave the man the fleeting impression, in her misty blue draperies, of the spirit of the moonlit scene—a moonbeam which flitted across one's heart, but, at a touch from rough hands, would vanish again.

Once—twice—she tried to speak, but the words would not come: she could only envelop him, as it were, in the radiant glory of her face. . . .

Suddenly a great wave of understanding broke over him, rendering him for a moment breathless, blinded, bewildered. . . . Then, instinctively, he raised his arms. With a little inarticulate cry the girl allowed him to take her, trembling in her capitulation, clinging to him, submitting, without resistance, to the storm of passion at last set free. His kisses burned into her soft flesh, his

arms crushed her well-nigh breathless; she was carried away by the tide of his ardor, responsive, glorying. . . .

Barbara had crossed her Rubicon for all time.

Presently he sat down upon the rocks, still holding her to him.

"You—came to tell me?" he whispered, his face close to hers, his eyes piercing to her very soul.

"Yes," she whispered back. . . .

After a time she raised herself, still in his arms.

"Alan, I—couldn't tell you before; until I felt convinced that all—was right. You understand; don't you? It was because I loved you so, dear heart, not—fear, or coldness——"

"I understand," he murmured, laying his cheek against hers. "I always understood. It was the beastly brute in me that sometimes seemed not to. . . . When, Barbara?"

Her head fell back upon his breast; with a little throbbing sigh, she renounced her will to his.

"Whenever—you like, Alan."

"At dawn?" he whispered. "It will soon be here. When the sun rises over the water it shall witness our—marriage rites?"

The passion had died out of his voice, and a note almost of awe had crept in.

Her eyes answered him. Then she turned them away over the stretch of silvery sand and coral beach, over the little groves of swaying palms, to the darkness of the wood beyond; thence to the dim purple horizon, along a pathway strewn with gleaming jewels where the moon-kissed waves shimmered as they rose and fell.

"We couldn't have a more beautiful temple," she murmured, half to herself.

They remained, sometimes silent, sometimes discussing, in low tones, their forthcoming bridal, while the moonlight waned, and the wonderful blue-black of the southern night softened and paled.

Presently Alan lowered the hand he held near his cheek and opened the fingers.

"What can we do about a wedding-ring?" he asked.

"Oh! Does that matter?"

"I should like to see you wearing one—of mine. Unfortunately I have neither a signet-ring nor a priceless heirloom taken from the finger of a dead great grandmother!"

The memory of Hugh's ring in the hut flashed across the girl's mind; but it brought now no poignant regrets.

"Wait, though!" he continued, searching in the pockets of his frayed breeches. He displayed a collection of keys, a pocket-knife, and a pencil, suspended upon a small tin key-ring.

"Will this fit? It's better than nothing." Detaching the articles, he took her left hand again; but she hastily withdrew it.

"It is unlucky to try on a wedding-ring!"

He laughed incredulously. "Surely you're not superstitious? You—native!"

"I'm so anxious not to risk anything—here. It looks about the right size, and will do beautifully. Oh, Alan! how I shall love it!"

He smiled, a world of tenderness in his eyes. "Look," he said. "Dawn is breaking." And he drew her back into his arms. . . .

Early birds began to chirp and whistle, away in the forest; the dancing waves turned a steely gray. The wind had dropped, leaving a great silence. It seemed as

if nature were holding her breath, waiting for the dawn not far off. . . . As the light increased, each tree and rock stood out dark and distinct; the distant birds left the shelter of their trees, flitting toward the lagoon, then wheeling back again. A flight of pigeons floated softly by in the still air, toward the belt of woodland in the east. As they disappeared, the line of leaden eastern sky became faintly suffused with softest opal. . . . When at last the sun's first long shaft of gold quivered across the water, the man rose and set the girl gently upon her feet. The hand in his trembled a little; but she met his eyes bravely, smilingly. . . .

With only the birds for witness, the sound of the surf for choir, the radiance of the eastern sky for altar, simply and from their hearts' depths these two plighted their troth. The few chief sentences from the marriage service were chosen by Barbara for their only rites.

There would be many, away in the world, to scoff, many to condemn. But no outward consecration of ground, no army of ordained priests, could have rendered more sacred that moment when the hush was broken by their low-voiced avowals. Perchance the "Destiny that shapes our ends," seeing all things, reading all hearts, Who had flung these two together upon this far garden of His own creation, and given them there the one supreme gift which is part of Himself, would understand and accept their vows:

" 'To love and to cherish till death us do part . . . And thereto I plight thee my troth. . . . ' "

Their voices did not falter. The small tin ring encircled the girl's finger: they stood silent a while, with locked hands. Then he drew her toward him, and very gently their lips met.

"My Wife!" he breathed.

. . . . . .

Smoke was rising from near Roowa's hut, where Meamaa cooked the early breakfast. Standing near the entrance, Laalo practised his combined new arts of counting and English with the white flowers he held.

"U-N . . . T-O-O . . . T-RE-E . . . A-aa!" Ending abruptly in a squeal of delight, he took to his heels.

Meamaa looked up. "A-aa!" she murmured to herself. "The white chiefs come down from the heights! Truly they have held speech with the gods, while we slept. Their faces are as the face of the dawn itself." Kneeling back from the fire, she gazed toward them, awe in her eyes.

Laalo ran nimbly across the rough ground. His fear of the white chief was great, but outweighed by his adoration of both; when opportunity permitted, he followed Barbara about like a black puppy.

"Ay-ey! Ay-ey!" he cried, his nearest approach to "Lady." Breathless, he thrust his crumpled blossoms toward her.

She took them with a laugh. "My wedding bouquet, Alan! Laalo, you ducky boy."

Alan was determined to have a honeymoon.

"Chimabahowmuch may arrive with some grievance if we stay at home," he said. "I don't want to speak to anybody but you, to-day. I'll give Roowa some orders; and we will go off in the boat together for the whole day."

He strode away to the native's hut, with Laalo, not comprehending the dangers of *tabu,* clinging shyly to his hand.

Barbara bathed, dressed, and got breakfast, with no thought of fatigue after a sleepless night. Her heart seemed almost unbearably full. Every now and again she glanced at the little ring upon her marriage finger, pressing it to her lips. As she watched the smoke curl up from her own fire, and that rising from Meamaa's hut, she resembled the primitive woman glorying in this life shorn of all false trappings. Was not Meamaa likewise cooking food for her man? In the south, too, the native women were so employed. Man and his mate—in palace or hovel, in mansion or hut! All the artificiality hiding the big realities faded away with the worlds beyond the blue horizon.

It was the same with Alan. Like some fine, strong, wild thing, he dived, swam and splashed in the river; then returned for breakfast, ravenously hungry, singing as he swung down the bay.

"I have a great surprise!" Barbara announced. "Here is a tin of 'bully beef.' I saved it for any emergency. Shall we have it for our wedding-feast, as a special treat?"

He shouted with laughter. "Lord! To think of 'bully' becoming a special treat for a wedding-feast! Bring it along, O wise and thrifty woman."

That was a wonderful day. They simply followed the inclination of each moment, now drifting idly upon the sun-kissed waves, now paddling with sudden whim to the reef or shore and landing to explore some fresh beauty. Nothing came to disturb their happiness; no jarring sights or sounds marred the glories around.

They ate their "wedding-feast" in a mossy shady dell; and even the memory of Aunt Dolly, who unconsciously had provided it, failed to cast more than a momentary shadow across their joy.

Alan lay along the bottom of the boat, his head pillowed in Barbara's lap, as the sun began to sink.

"Well?" he asked. "Have you found a desert island honeymoon very irksome? What about the big cities where you expected to 'feel life'? What about your heart's desire?"

She laughed low, passing caressing fingers through his hair. "I have no other heart's desire. You are life itself to me now, Alan. That's why——"

"You came to me last night?" he suggested softly, as she stopped.

She nodded. The boat drifted idly, caressed by the soft breeze, rocking gently with the tide.

"Thank God you did," he murmured, after a pause. "Everything was becoming—unbearable."

She trailed her fingers in the water, lost in thought.

"It was strange," she observed presently, "that the day on which I first began to feel—what you had become to me—should have been my wedding-day!"

"Those first months here nearly drove me mad—until I was sure the field was clear," he replied. "Then I meant to win!" He turned his head, smiling up at her. "When you appeared in boy's attire, I knew I had won. It only needed a little more time and patience before you would—understand, too."

"I was blind—blind," she murmured. "And in England I was blind, too. Alan, isn't it awful to think of the tragic mistakes made through blindness?"

"It is. But it seems to me that often it is only 'blind man's buff.' If we tried we could pull off the bandage and see."

"What do you call the 'bandage'?"

He thought in silence for a moment. "Self, I suppose,"

he said slowly at last. "That begets envy, lack of consideration—everything the jolly old parsons preach about."

Barbara pondered over this.

"After all," she mused, "if we all considered each other too much the world would come to a standstill! Like two over-polite people passing and repassing the butter-dish and neither getting any butter. Most things are founded on self, aren't they? Personal or national ambitions cause competition; and that makes things move when otherwise they might never get started."

"Your wisdom doesn't reflect too creditably on humanity," he laughed. "But it's true. And our old keynote gets lost—buried in materialism. Yet the poor old world is realizing—as you did at Darbury—that something is missing which it can't find. All the time, if it just paused and looked—Lord! one does see things differently here—*now*."

"Instead of crowning the harmony, we all spoil it," she said, intent on her beloved theme which he had first awakened. "All down the ages it has been the same. All sorts of laws or schemes for improvements; yet everybody causing each other such personal misery! Isn't it putting the cart before the horse? Mrs. Field sees that, I think. She has a very true grip of things."

"Yes," he agreed warmly. "Her work is always warm and human, like herself. You never find it ruined by materialism, or the damned commercial spirit which spoils every enterprise nowadays. Ideals? They're scorned! But she keeps hers."

"I suppose—once—she found the real keynote—as we have?" the girl murmured, with her newly-awakened knowledge.

"Ah, yes! And she never lost it; she passed it on to others."

"Oh, Alan!" With sudden passion she drew his head back against her breast. "If I lost you—my husband—I couldn't rise to her heights. I should die."

He turned in her arms, and pressed his lips to her soft neck.

"Barbara! It means—all that—to you, at last?"

They stayed in the boat until darkness had fallen. Then Alan took the oars he had fashioned, and paddled back to land.

Silence fell upon them as they neared the shore. It was the hour when exterior things diminished to nothingness, and the Big Things were too vast for conversation. He beached the boat, then slipped his arm around the girl and drew her toward the hut.

"Our wedding-night, Barbara," he whispered.

Her feet lingered a little, and she paused now and then to admire beauties of scent or sound; the rising moon showed her face tremulous. Outside the dark hut, she drew herself free, turning toward the sea as though loath to leave it. It seemed as though she were silently bidding farewell to some part of her life; and the man behind her stood motionless, his eyes on her averted head, silently waiting, making no attempt to touch her. . . .

At last, slowly, she turned and held out her hands. He took them close in his.

"Come, my dearest," he said.

V

Six months, when you live in an earthly paradise, are but a flash of vivid light in a sky which is always blue. These two had crossed their looming mountains

and arrived at the valley upon the other side; and they found it fair and shining, full of the songs of birds.

The days sped by, each seeming to exceed in beauty its predecessor. There was no need now to fill each moment with arduous, thankless toil. All walls and divisions were down. When Alan, with a few slashing cuts, severed the bamboo partition in their sleeping-hut, it had been symbolic.

"There!" he exclaimed, his foot upon the canes strewing the floor. "No more twos. Everything's *one*."

"One!" she breathed, renouncing, with the outward surrender of her only privacy, all the private strongholds of her nature. But the look she gave him was no longer elusive. It was steadfast, shining, exultant. . . .

There were the most wonderful walks. Every corner of the island had to be revisited under these new and perfect conditions. They had the most wonderful talks. Everything in their minds, from the first conscious thought they could remember, had to be brought out for inspection: those approved, to be shared and deepened; those rejected, to be thrown away.

"However did we exist, years ago?" the girl exclaimed one day, while they sat by the river. "It wasn't *life*," she continued. "It was—how shall I describe it?—paddling in surf instead of swimming in the sea. Darbury! Clothes, crops, servants, scandals! No other conversation, unless somebody quarreled and thrilled us for a few weeks. Or, occasionally, some one's pig died, and we had that for breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner."

"The pig?"

"No, silly! The cause of its death. Everybody had strong theories about it and waxed very solemn. Then there was the church. How sick I was of church argu-

ments, church work and church workers! People were so intolerant of any little bit of ritual which didn't appeal to them. Endless quarrels about the outside shell! All those ceaseless services and ceremonies left me quite cold. Don't all the different sects and creeds seem far off and beside the point, here?"

"They do."

"But I suppose each is necessary to suit different temperaments," she mused.

"Yes; that's why they are interesting," he agreed, splashing the water about with his feet from his seat upon the river-bank. "You remind me of a friend of mine who sold his house in the Midlands because he heard of nothing but carburetors whenever he met a fellow-creature. He happened to be more than a mechanic, poor devil! The world's full of round pegs in square holes, but each peg is usually so damned intolerant of the other!"

"I sometimes hope we never get rescued," she exclaimed, sitting up and clasping her knees. "Imagine going back to it all! Here we seem so near—God."

"We always shall be, wherever we go together," he said, leaning his head back against her hands. "Wherever we are, you and I will always be at the heart of life now."

She laid her lips to his hair, thrilling to the truth of his words.

Away in the wilderness she had found the "hidden want": the love which, with all its many far-reaching subkeys, can alone tune the extraordinary cosmology called life into any semblance of an harmonious whole. . . .

Sometimes they played ridiculous games upon the sand, gambling with the money lying useless in their luggage.

"Give me the context of the following," one of them would perhaps say, reeling off quotations that would have left the Reverend Horne breathless. The winnings were fairly even over this; but if geography provided the topic, Barbara became nearly bankrupt. By adroitly switching on to the Catechism, however, she recovered her fortune and half of his. Sometimes a string of dates opened the game, and history ruled. This was a good diversion, a kind of mental cricket. Each had an innings, beginning always with "1066, William I." On one brilliant occasion Alan went successfully as far as Anne. Once Barbara reached George I, but was caught out, the little matter of Henry VIII having been forgotten.

They hunted, fished, worked, bathed together. And, during these months, each learned much, which was accumulated and stored within their hearts.

Their clothes were in rags, but they made fun of the matter. Alan clung to his old razor, and Barbara to her scissors.

"After all," she said, "we can cover ourselves in reed-matting. Provided you don't grow a beard, I can face anything."

Six months of perfect happiness! It was against all the rules of fate; but even fate seemed to have cast off these two for a time. For some reason the world was made passing beautiful, and human beings placed in it without any choice. But the attainment, much less the possession, of permanent bliss therein has not been decreed.

Hurled into the universe without choice, at least health and life's bare necessities might reasonably be expected. But even these are often withheld. Yet there must be no impatience; no failure of gratitude for the few miser-

able crumbs which fall occasionally into lives dark through suffering. Everything comes from God; and God is Love, they are told! Those who rebel are labeled "queer," accused of limited vision, lack of faith in an underlying purpose.

Platitudes console some people, and perhaps those so easily satisfied are to be envied. And if groping souls entangled in the intricacies of thought can not find the "heavenly harmony" for discord, maybe it is not really lost. No wild bird escapes from a room by impotently beating its wings against deceptive glass, then giving up in despair. It has to search for the open door. And searching may tire the limbs and never prove successful; but is strengthening to the constitution.

At the end of six months, the first ominous cloud appeared. Chimabahoi the native chief, fell ill and died. Babooma became head of the tribe.

No care or pity for his fellows permeated the hide of brutality encasing Babooma. All the worst instincts of the savage, held in check by the old chief under Croft's influence, now rose to the surface. His own adherents, impatient of restraints, hailed him with joy. The division in the settlement became at once more evident: murmuring dissatisfaction upon one side, threats and tortures upon the other.

The white man's popularity had increased with the increase of health, cleanliness and industry among the natives. Now he took full advantage of it, and only his continuous intervention maintained order. The position, however, was fraught with danger. To continue to inspire a semi-superstitious fear after more than eighteen months was in itself a precarious task, only achieved by the weight of his own personality. Further-

more, he was confronted by Babooma's personal hatred. From Roowa he had learned of the chief's mania for women, and women were scarce in the tribe. White women no longer offended the black men's instincts. . . .

At present vivid memories of a wounded shoulder, blue devils hissing from round Croft's hut, the supposition of a hidden white tribe ever at hand, restrained Babooma from defiance of a man *tabu*. But familiarity and the scraps of education imparted by the white people were gaining upon superstition. . . . It was only a matter of time.

Alan walked home one night full of foreboding after a day in the south. Barbara, anxious-eyed, met him near the palm grove.

"It isn't safe for you to go alone to Babooma," she said, linking her arm in his, noting the worry in his eyes, but forbearing comment. "What happened? You have been away for ages."

"Babooma had confiscated all the stored breadfruit," he replied, "and ordered every man to surrender his share of the *taro* crop. Old Yolaano refused. So Babooma got wild and held the old fellow's hands in the fire until most of the skin was burned off, to prevent his working on the land again."

She shuddered, hiding her face on his arm. "What have you done about it?"

"I couldn't do much—that's the damned part of it all. I succeeded in scaring Babooma to death—for a time. He gave up the stuff and groveled. But it won't last."

"Can't you kill him?"

He smiled a little at this calm request, while he unfastened the entrance in their palisade. "You bloodthirsty ex-parson's daughter!"

"But he will ruin the entire tribe. Everything we have done will be undone."

"If everybody were put into the next world who upset other people's efforts, the population would be small!" he laughed. "If I killed Babooma, civil war would break out. You must remember he has a large following."

"I am so afraid for you, Alan," she owned.

"He daren't kill me."

She faced him on the threshold of the hut, a savage glint in her eyes.

"If he did, I would kill him with my own hands! As I tried to do before; do you remember?"

"Could I forget?" he asked, passing an arm round her neck. "I foresee endless trouble if we ever get back to England! A savage wife following me about with loaded revolver, holding up the traffic in Piccadilly, firing upon policemen——"

"Idiot!" She rubbed her head caressingly in the crook of his elbow. "There's only one bullet left. I shall keep it for him, in case——" Leaving the sentence unfinished, she busied herself with preparations for supper, relating meanwhile the events of her own day. Afterward they went into their garden to plan certain improvement. By means of lumps of coral and small rocks, Barbara had persuaded the little stream to give a tiny waterfall, an achievement which she termed an engineering feat, and showed with pride.

"Laalo helped," she said; "but he insisted afterward upon sitting at the bottom, so that the water fell all over him. He said he wanted to 'wash white in the white chief's river!'"

Alan laughed, placing a foot upon the coral and letting the cool water ripple over his toes.

"Laalo's brain is beginning to work," he observed thoughtfully. "The natives are learning to use their reasoning powers very quickly now. If ever we can bring the island into touch with the world, there is a foundation for trade on a small scale."

The girl glanced round the peaceful scene.

"Wouldn't everything be spoiled?" she exclaimed. "Imagine traders and sailors chattering and bartering in this bay. The natives would become half-civilized and completely ruined. It would be almost as bad as taking them to England."

"Oh!" he laughed, "that would be an interesting problem. Put them into huts in Kensington Gardens, and I wonder what would happen?"

"Aunt Mary would measure the men for trousers."

"I believe you! Then the collector of rates and taxes would arrive, followed by the education authorities, not to mention representatives of every mission under the sun. Poor devils! wouldn't they be wretched?"

She gave a little grunt of sympathy, climbing into the hammock.

"I can't bear to think of it," she exclaimed. "Whether a country should be left an undisturbed product of nature like this is, or civilized, is a difficult question, isn't it? Money, position and externals of that sort, seem of such little importance now; but if once civilization stepped in they would begin to count, and the charm of the island would be lost."

Alan pushed her legs unceremoniously aside and sat on the edge of the hammock, swaying it with his foot. "That's true," he agreed; "but, as it is, the natives spoil things by their own stupidity. It proves that circumstances don't really count altogether: whether civilized

or savage, we all make our own hell or heaven for ourselves and others."

Barbara had quickly perceived that her man, in spite of attempts at lightness, was seriously troubled concerning the tribe. Dimly aware herself of the first faint clouds in the brightness of their sky, heralding a possible storm, she sought to hide them, to keep their happiness undisturbed.

"It is our heaven—here," she replied, reaching for his hand. "Do you remember the desolation when we first came?—when you called it hell? Oh, Alan! our love seems now to overflow all around. I feel, somehow, different toward the whole world!"

He bent toward her with glowing eyes. "I feel like that, too," he said simply. As he leaned down and passed his arms beneath and around her, she suddenly clasped him close.

"Supposing it should end? I couldn't bear to lose it all now."

"It can't be lost," he said quickly. "Every event that happens is one more added to our store of beautiful things. Even if it ceased, it would never be really lost!"

She smiled a little. "That's very beautiful and idealistic, but—horribly unsatisfying!" . . .

During the following months this cloud grew ever more menacing. Those natives who, fundamentally brutal and idle, had not appreciated their enforced life of industry, quickly deteriorated under Babooma's leadership. His adherents increased in number, as did his cruelties. There being insufficient grown women, he seized young girls, almost children, made them the toys of his lusts, and afterward they disappeared—sometimes, under cloak of religious fanaticism, upon the sacrificial altar

to Balhuaka; sometimes to satiate his own appetite for human flesh.

Many times Croft was on the point of utilizing that last bullet. But with it his influence would have vanished. Natives regard their own chief with extraordinary superstition. To them he is permanently *tabu*. The next in rank was one of Babooma's followers. Only more danger would have resulted for Barbara and himself, and probably civil war in the settlement. These people were insisting on making their own hell, and nobody could save them short of exterminating half their number.

The sense of fatalism permeating the native character affected Barbara. Her fears increased tenfold for Alan's safety. She strove bravely to hide her growing premonitions of disaster, never attempting to hinder his labors among the tribe, insisting upon accompanying him.

"Wherever you go I am going, too," she protested.

"Even into the stewpot?" he smiled. "What wifely devotion!"

"If necessary," she agreed, forcing herself to a gay tone of voice. "Soup with mixed ingredients is more tasty." The never-failing stimulation of his personality, with its mixture of unexpected lightness and depth, caused her real happiness to remain established above all these fears. She experienced no regrets, no misgivings for the irrevocable step they had taken. A great understanding, a new outlook upon humanity, formed within her heart, softening and changing her old impatience when she thought of the modern world seething far away, or considered this prehistoric little world around her. Humanity, not civilization or environment, was at fault, defeating its own ends. It needed pity, tolerance, a great sympathy; above all loving help, not censure. . . .

After a time Alan refused to allow her near the settlement. She said little. She passed long hours with Meamaa and her children, banishing the mental torture during his absence in the radiance of her welcome upon his return.

But he noted silently the growing wistfulness of her face, the strain of eyes and nerves; felt the clinging of her hands. Sometimes he relegated all necessary work to Roowa, and they spent a long day in the boat, striving to recapture the unalloyed bliss of their "honeymoon." But her old dislike of showing weakness remained, preventing the confidence which might have relieved her mind. Her face sharpened, and she grew thinner. . . .

One night he returned, after a stormy day's battling in the south, with his own optimism gravely shaken. It was, he knew, but a question of days before the threatening mine should burst. The division had widened to an extent which only blood and explosion would, eventually, bridge; it needed but a match to the fuse, and that explosion would come.

Barbara did not meet him as usual. He wondered a little, making his way quickly down to their hut. Supper was ready, but she was not there. He looked into the sleeping-hut, but that also was empty. Anxiously he turned his steps toward Roowa's abode. Meamaa sat outside, suckling a new addition to her family, crooning softly over the little dark form.

She waved an arm toward the east.

"The great chief's wife went up to the heights long, long ago! Meamaa still watching for her," she said.

He strode off up the slope, and the native woman continued her crooning song.

Barbara was seated upon the rocks where, nearly a

year before, the dawn had witnessed their simple marriage ceremony. Her elbows were propped on her knees, her chin was sunk in her hands.

Alan approached noiselessly, but she became instinctively aware of his presence. He noticed a strange expression in her eyes as she turned to greet him: a far-seeing wonder blended with a tenderness which seemed reflected in the smiling, tremulous lines of her mouth.

She silently stretched out her hands, and he took them in his mystified.

"I wondered what had become of you——" he began.

"I felt I must come here. This always seems a kind of sacred temple, our own. . . . Oh, Alan!"

She gazed into his face half-smiling, yet with a suspicion of tears dimming the soft light in her eyes.

"What, dear?" he asked, more puzzled.

She made no reply; but the glory in her face seemed to deepen, radiating toward him. . . . Loosing his hands, her arms crept up to his shoulders, round his neck, drawing his head down to her own.

A sudden, vague realization of some stupendous happening caused him to draw her close. "What is it, Barbara?" he murmured. "What are you trying to tell me?"

She tilted her head back a little, and saw the dawning comprehension in his face. A faint smile flickered again across her own.

"Can't you guess—my husband?"

Instantly he was conscious of the same inimitable tenderness in her regard which he had just seen in the eyes of the woman suckling her child. The same mysterious essence of motherhood seemed to emanate from both. With a muttered cry, his lips sought hers; he caught her close, pressing her to his heart as if daring all the forces

of nature, all the venom of savage humanity, to take her from him now.

As he held her, a great and unusual humility enwrapped him. During this past year the old arrogance of man exulting in the capture of his mate had softened; her essential womanliness had brought out all the chivalry and tenderness of his inner nature. It is the masculine caricature of womanhood which crushes these latent flowers in man, freezing them like spring frosts where soft sunshine is needed. Afterward, when complaining of having lost his affection, these women never look within themselves and realize that they have played havoc with all his cherished ideals while boasting of their imaginary emancipation. Home-breakers instead of home-makers, they are but enthralled the more: this time in emptiness, in the loveless misery following upon short-sightedness.

Alan felt a passionate reverence for the spirit of all true womanhood well up within him, understanding the great generosity, the unwavering loyalty and courage, of his particular sanctuary into which he had won his way. . . . For a while, as he bowed his face upon her short curly hair, he forgot the dangers looming ahead, and thought only of the wonder of her and her love.

Suddenly, impulsively, she looked up into his eyes.

"Shall you love—It?" she whispered.

A reflection of her own tenderness showed in the smile which answered her. The glory of the sinking sun illuminated his face.

"Shall I?" he breathed. "My dearest—what a question!"

VI

HAND in hand they descended the hill, full of this fresh wonder. After supper they sat on the shore in the moonlight, talking in low tones of the future, making wonderful plans. . . .

"You will have to educate—It!" she remarked suddenly, after a silent flight into realms of imagination.

"Lord!" he ejaculated. He sat and watched the water musingly, for a time. "The island for schoolroom, nature for books——"

"And what shall we call It?" she broke in, off on another flight.

He lay back upon the beach, and laughed up into her eyes. "You little mother!" he whispered.

Both possessed that curious sensitiveness to nature which compels one, in any crisis, to make for open spaces, limitless horizons of ocean. . . . It was after midnight when at last they went to bed. The night breeze had died down, and a peculiar sense of airlessness pervaded the island; the water became calm to oiliness.

"We shall have a thunder-storm soon," Alan observed, closing the outer door of the hut.

Barbara was restless, and lay long awake. The strange stillness with its sensation of false calm heralding approaching tempest, revived her premonitions of disaster. When at last she fell asleep, it was only to be tortured with the same premonitions magnified into nightmare realities. She awoke gasping and sobbing in Alan's arms, and clung to him feverishly.

"I dreamed you had disappeared," she cried, in bewildered explanation.

"How could that happen?" He soothed her. "How could my bulk disappear? Don't talk nonsense!"

But she was unstrung by the vividness of it all.

"I can't endure the possibility of our life together ever ending!" she cried passionately. "It's so perfect here. We're so happy."

"So rapturously happy!" he agreed, holding her close. "You mustn't get morbid thoughts, darling; especially now. Why should it end? It will soon be fuller than ever. We are going to hand on the torch: think of the glory of that.—The biggest invention that ever happened! To-morrow we will go out in the boat, and blow away these cobwebs. . . ."

But the morrow brought a very different program.

They breakfasted later than usual, and had barely finished when the noise of many agitated voices reached their ears.

Glancing apprehensively at each other, they hurried out of the hut.

The sky was leaden, hues of angry orange suffusing the horizon, the air oppressive. From the direction of the palm grove streamed a hurrying, chattering crowd of black figures—men, women and children.

Croft's brow contracted, and his lips set. The mine had evidently exploded even sooner than he expected.

Seeing him, a wailing cry arose from the advancing crowd. Weary and terrified, they stumbled forward to the palisade, where the women fell upon the ground, moaning, weeping, waving wild arms, sometimes adding their voices to the unintelligible babble of the men. To comprehend their meaning was at present impossible. With Barbara close by him, he waited inside the fence, his hands resting on the top, silently watching the rabble without, conscious of a great pity and love for these children of nature who had evidently come to him for

protection. Their implicit trust thrilled his heart with as much pride as when, during the war, more than one coveted decoration had been pinned upon his breast.

Presently their talk grew more coherent: he was able to make out its drift.

"We will serve thee, O Great White Chief! . . . Thou art merciful! Thou art wise beyond the wisdom of our men! . . . We will work for thee, O Chief! Thou carest not to torture and kill. . . . A-aa! A-aa! . . . Thou hast done much for our tribe. Under thee it will become strong, if thou wilt be our chief. The fruits of the earth will grow, the fish leap up from the water! . . . We love thee, O Mighty Friend of the Gods! We will serve thee! . . ." Thus, and much more with a similar burden, did they babble in their eagerness.

Listening, the memory of a night two years before flashed across his mind—when these same primitive men had come with intent to kill, learning their fear of him through his adaptation of electrical science; when the dawn of the world had seemed to meet the twentieth century's wonders face to face, each exposed in unnecessary antipathy, with the same human thread of fear and self-protection connecting them.

Commanding silence, he bade one of them explain the cause of this visitation.

Babooma, it transpired, soon after Croft's departure the previous evening, had worked himself into a passion. Expressing contempt for the white man and his gods, he raised the *tabu*. Encouraged by his own adherents, he then declared war upon the white chief with instant death to all who thwarted his designs. This set the fuse alight. An outburst of murmuring disloyalty to Babooma warred with the usual superstitious fear of him as their

god-ordained chief; while their genuine affection for Croft flared up to white heat. To prove his words, maddened by opposition, Babooma seized and strangled one of the men who dared openly to rebel.

This was too much for the peaceful faction. Secretly and swiftly, they conspired together, under cover of night. While the rest of the tribe slept, they stole out—some eighty odd, including women and children—and sped through the woods to the north.

This drastic move meant a tremendous decision, bound around as they were with age-old superstitions. To renounce the authority of their own chief only equaled in audacity the act of throwing themselves upon the mercy of a white being, lovable yet terrifying, whose powers were supernatural. The consciousness of the irrevocability of their deed overwhelmed them now; and it was a forlorn, terror-stricken little band which Croft presently addressed. He spoke kindly, trying to allay their fear, feeling a certain relief that the anticipated trouble had occurred so soon. Most of the men, he noticed, were fully armed: therefore it should not be impossible to overthrow Babooma and, once for all, quell the savage element.

"Whether I can be your chief or not is in the hands of my gods," he concluded, with prudent piety; "but rest assured of my protection. Your women and children are tired from the long walk through the forest. Let them come inside our garden for safety and food."

He opened the entrance in the palisade. Awestruck into silence, they filed through, their minds full of the "little blue devils," experienced here by their menfolk. Might these not spring up and burn them even now at the great white chief's command? They squatted in one

close group, hungry and grateful for all they received, following Barbara's movements with adoring, wondering eyes, as she distributed food. Their faith in Croft equaled their faith in their god, Balhuaka; once within the palisade, their fears of Babooma sank. The men, resting outside, kept a sharp watch for any daylight attack. Roowa was sent to feed them. Alan went indoors to attend to his store of native weapons. . . . Presently the excited visitors in the garden, tired and satisfied, fell asleep. . . .

The leaden sky grew more lowering; an angry breeze rustled the palm-tops and stirred the oily water. The surf began to boom portentously against the reef; the waves of the lagoon, usually so gentle, broke roughly upon the shore. Rain began to fall in big splashing drops, waking the sleeping women. A sudden vivid flash of lightning brought them to their feet with wild cries of fear, which were swallowed up in a deafening roar of thunder.

For a few minutes pandemonium reigned. The frightened children cried, and their mothers wailed, not knowing if this were the wrath of the white chief's gods, or that of Balhuaka overtaking them for forsaking their own leader. Like terrified sheep, they obeyed Croft's directions, huddling together in the original kitchen hut.

"It's going to be a grand storm," he said to Barbara.

All the artillery of the skies seemed to be massed above; all the cavalry of the universe charged through the waving tree-tops, swaying their slender trunks, or bending down the branches of the forest giants under the heavy downpour of rain. Great zigzag flashes rent the darkened sky over the tossing waves; the angry surf hurled white crests of foam high into the air against the

reef, retreating with a roaring hiss for yet another charge. Once—twice—and yet again, came a rattling report like that of musketry; and each time one of the trees not far away received its death-warrant.

Barbara talked to the women, trying to allay their fears, helping to soothe the crying children. Croft cheered them with bland assurances of this wrath of the gods being directed at Babooma, not themselves. The electricity around, and the rolling crashes of thunder, stirred his blood in much the same way as the booming guns of war had done, a few years before. The primitive savage in him was impatient to get at grips with his enemy; the latent spirit of fatherhood stirred in his veins as he watched Barbara holding Meamaa's baby in her arms.

She smiled at him over the tiny dark face.

"He looks so serious; doesn't he? Why do babies always look so old and wise, Alan?"

"Perhaps they die old in a previous existence, and hurry into the next too soon?" he suggested, touching the wrinkled little forehead with his finger.

Then his glowing eyes met hers; and she drew a quick breath. . . .

The storm was long and severe. Gradually, however, it tired itself out, dying down with fitful spurts of renewed energy and blazes of life, until, soon after midday, the island was bathed in a great calm. The sun struggled out of hiding; birds fluttered from their retreats, to shake their wet wings; all the exquisite, subtle scents of flower and herbage stole forth and blended in an indescribable sweetness.

Croft deemed it expedient to wait for Babooma to attack. To attempt a return with these tired men risked meeting the enemy in the interstices of the forest, where

open fighting would be impossible. Given at last the excuse, he determined to take no avoidable chances in attempting the extermination of the growing menace to the prosperity of the tribe. He therefore inspected their weapons, arming those who had forgotten sword, spear or arrow; afterward, with Roowa as adjutant, he posted part of his little army round the tent, and issued directions. A few men were sent in search of fresh fruits along the north of the forest, Alan busying himself with the remainder in strengthening the hut and palisade. With the revolver, loaded with its one remaining bullet, in her belt, Barbara found her time fully occupied with the problem of preparing sufficient food for these uninvited guests. Her usual store of cocoanuts and dried breadfruit would have been insufficient, had not Alan experimented of late in the drying and storing of foodstuff—partly with some vague foresight of this contingency; but chiefly for outlet to his inborn instinct for experiment.

As the sun moved round to the west, a great tranquillity fell upon the island so recently storm-tossed. It reached her heart, soothing the old forebodings even in face of their possible fulfilment. . . . Suddenly she started from her peaceful employment, and her cheeks blenched. A shrill cry of fear had sounded beyond the garden. . . . Another arose, yet another. . . . She hurried out of the hut, meeting Alan running from the landward end of the palisade, where he had been working. Outside the seaward entrance, a group of natives clustered together, chattering excitedly, staring at some far point in the sky. At sight of Croft, their agitation increased.

"A-aa! a-aa! Great Chief, behold!" they cried,

pointing upward. "See! A great bird approacheth. Hearken to the sound of his wings, the cry of his wrath! A-aa! A bird of ill omen, O Mighty Chief!" They began to wail and moan, striking their breasts. Others joined them, taking up the cry: "A bird of ill omen! A-aa! a-aa! A bird of ill omen, O Mighty Chief!"

He shaded his eyes with his hands, searching the dazzling blue.

Suddenly his arms fell to his sides; and he turned to the girl.

"By God! It's an aeroplane! Coming this way, too!"

He called to Roowa. "Go, Roowa! run! Take fire to the beacon upon the hill! Make it to blaze fast and high! Go—swift as the lightning flash——!"

Roowa did not hesitate. To him this beacon meant some strange religious rite known only to the white chief and his gods. Not doubting that its ignition would save them all from some new doom, he fled for a torch.

Far off, the noise of her engines but faintly audible, the unmistakable outline of an aeroplane showed at a great height, flying toward the island from the north.

The natives, forgetting all instructions, clustered together, full of superstitious terror. The women and children left the garden and huddled near their men, a few moaning, the rest silent from fear of this new Unknown.

Alan's fingers gripped Barbara's arm, and they ran down to the shore. With faces pale and tense, they stood there motionless, their hearts racing chaotically, their eyes fixed upon the speck growing ever larger, looming nearer and nearer. . . . The distant drone of the engines became louder. . . . From the hilltop a

column of smoke rose into the clear air; soon a leaping flame mingled with it . . . another shot up higher. . . . As the machine whirred, loudly and swiftly, to within a few hundred yards, still flying high, the pile of sticks and leaves, branches and undergrowth—quickly dried in the afternoon sun—burned, and roared, and leaped, the red tongues of fire and billowing smoke showing clear against the blue of sea and sky.

"Will they see it?" muttered Alan.

He waved wildly; but the aeroplane flew serenely on, skirting the island, toward the west.

"Damn them!" he ejaculated. "They must see that fire!"

Barbara held her breath, every nerve taut. But as the strain seemed to reach breaking-point, the machine slackened speed. With sudden cessation of noise, her engines were shut off, and she came swiftly down in large circles until low over the water; then she turned and flew slowly back outside the barrier reef. Turning again, she rose a little, flying up toward the beacon—then round again, and back to the reef.

Alan could recognize her now for a seaplane. Seeing two figures upon her, once more he waved, shouting vociferously. . . . With a graceful swoop down, again she turned, sinking lower and lower; until at last she rested upon the calm waters of the lagoon, and came skimming lightly toward the shore. . . .

A silence of horror had fallen upon the natives. Some dropped on their knees or flung themselves on their faces, not daring to look seaward; others stood still as death, their glittering eyes never wavering from the figure of their white chief, their hands grasping their weapons—ready at a word to dash forward, with their blood-curdling

yells, to his aid. . . . Then one or two rubbed their eyes, as if unable to see aright. . . . The white chief was wading out, unarmed, into the rippling wavelets, to meet the awful bird of ill omen. . . . They looked fearfully at one another; then held their breath. . . . He had returned to land. . . . Two queer figures enveloped in much clothing, with fearsome goggle eyes protruding from their heads, were descending from between the vast wings. . . . The white chief and his wife were talking, laughing, wringing their hands again and again. . . . But lo! the huge eyes fell from those faces. . . . The natives lifted up their voices in a howl of fear. . . .

Down by the water, a babel of English and French voices, torrents of questions pouring forth in both languages, the replies unheeded in the mutual relief, surprise and excitement! The two Frenchmen mixed both tongues indiscriminately, shaking the Englishman's hands again and again, kissing those of the girl in their demonstrative exuberance.

They had, it transpired, been swept from their bearings in the thunder-storm, having accepted a bet to fly from America to Honolulu, thence to Australia, in their small seaplane. While endeavoring to recapture their route between the two latter places, faced with engine trouble, they had perceived the beacon flaring below. . . . They introduced themselves—Philippe and Louis de Borceau, thirsting for adventure to enliven the monotony of post-war existence.

"And you, M'sieu? You say you live here for two years; *oui?* . . . *Mon Dieu!*" Philippe's eyes, traveling quickly over the scene, in their goggles, alighted suddenly upon the negro figures. For a moment he stood transfixed; then he grasped his brother's arm.

"Diable! Canneebles!" Crossing himself with his free hand, he looked quickly at Croft; while Louis whipped off his goggles in horrified amazement. The howl from many throats arose with disconcerting abruptness.

Croft threw back his head in a burst of boyish laughter.

"They are friends! Don't be alarmed."

Advancing a few steps, he addressed the bewildered natives in words whose utter unintelligibility caused the two strangers to gaze at him, then at the girl, an uneasy suspicion rising in their minds that the Englishman's brain had softened. However, relief was obvious among the group of blacks, and a murmur of voices broke forth. . . .

Croft returned; and further explanations were given. Bit by bit the excited Frenchmen grasped the main facts of this extraordinary situation.

"Votre nom?" cried the elder. *"En route* to *l'Australie,* you tell us? But I remember—*dites-moi*—quick—your name, M'sieu?"

Upon hearing it, the little Frenchman danced.

"Ciel! I remember!" cried Louis. "All de vorld was interested! It was thought you all perish. But you and——" He paused. He glanced at Barbara, at the hand which, instinctively, she had clasped round Alan's arm. . . .

And in that pause, something cold and clammy seemed to clutch the girl's heart, causing her to grip closer the arm she held.

Alan put his hand over hers.

"My wife," he said very clearly.

Both the Frenchmen now remembered the stir caused by the loss of the aeroplane and all on board. They

remembered the many accounts and photographs of those missing, which had appeared in the press of several countries. The momentary silence might have been awkward with men of a different nationality. But it was quickly broken by the elder, who stepped forward, bowed with all his native courtliness, and raised the girl's hand to his lips.

"Madame Croft—your servant. We shall, I hope, be of much serveece to you and your husband."

Nobody at that moment realized the incongruity of the old world French manners upon this rough coral shore, with the barefooted English man and girl in their threadbare scanty garments.

Something seemed to contract in Barbara's throat, rendering speech impossible.

The world had thrown a shadow across the perfect blue.

Proud of their home, they led their guests thither for food, when the seaplane had been safely beached. There during the meal, they explained the native trouble. The idea of fighting anything or anybody thrilled both these adventurous young men.

"Vat guns have you?" they asked, "vat ammunitions?"

When informed of the lack of firearms, and shown the bows, arrows, spears and crossed wooden swords, they sat and gasped. The weapons, no less than the hut, with its many ingenious devices for use and comfort, aroused their keenest interest.

"Eh! But it is a leetle paradise!" cried Philippe. "Vat you call 'cosay!' All ze chairs! And a table! And ze flowers!" He turned to Barbara, when Alan went out to restore order among the natives. "You have turned ze wilderness into home, Madame! It is dat you vill not like to leave it! *Oui?*"

She looked around the familiar room she loved so well, out through the doorway to the black figures in the garden, which had been such a pride. She saw the evening sunlight turning the indigo blue of the lagoon to gold, as she had so often loved to watch it do—and again she felt her heart contract.

The shadowy outside world had once more become a tangible reality.

VII

The engine trouble proved more serious than the Frenchmen had anticipated. Any idea of a dash to civilization for succor was abandoned. Until the sun had set and the moon risen, the three men worked upon it, Croft with the delight of a child over the return of some long-lost toy. When a short trial trip was made, he took the pilot's seat.

A wail of distress rose from the natives when he climbed into the machine. After taxi-ing her about, he skimmed lightly over the lagoon and rose gracefully into the darkening sky, managing her with the sure delicate touch of the expert—glorying in the old familiar noise and vibration, the rush of air, and sense of infinite freedom, as he soared out over the reef.

Another sharp spasm of pain shot through Barbara's heart, as she looked round upon the faces she knew so well. Much as rescue would mean to them both, the thought of renouncing their free life here filled her with grief. The prospect of bowing again to all the little rules making a maze of civilization chilled her. The analogy presented itself to her mind of being slowly caught up into some huge net spreading over the universe, beyond which lay this little wilderness where she had dwelt and learned to love.

With increasing heaviness of heart she pacified the wailing natives, bewildered by these strange events; and her smile at their vociferous welcome of their white chief, upon his return, was akin to tears.

Croft's instinct was to send her away to immediate safety; but that proved impossible. He conferred lengthily with the two brothers, under cover of their work together. Afterward, leaving Louis to finish, he and Philippe went indoors to pore over charts, discuss routes and conclude arrangements. When, later, the two aviators, dead tired after their adventures, were rolled in their huge coats upon the floor, the native men posted and prepared for all emergencies outside, the women and children packed safely, if like sardines, within the kitchen and sitting-room huts, he drew Barbara into their bedroom and unfolded the plans.

Should Babooma attack in the night, the Frenchmen, however zealous, would obviously fail to distinguish friends from foe. Their responsibility, therefore, would be the safeguarding of the women and children in the hut—Barbara's welfare being their special consideration.

"Should things go badly, and Babooma manage to do me in," he continued hurriedly, "trust yourself entirely to them: they know what to do and where to go. If, after all, he doesn't attack, but waits for us to move, Philippe de Borceau will take you away at daybreak and send help. His brother will stay with me."

She demurred hotly to this, unwilling to leave him in danger, protesting against being compelled to desert her post among the frightened women. The argument waxed long and heated between them. But, when Croft's mind was finally and irrevocably made up, anger and tears proved unavailing. Only by reminding her

of the debt owed to another; by prevailing upon all her rising motherhood, did he at last break down her resistance.

"But my mental agonies will be worse than physical ones!" she assured him, rebelliously. "I hope Babooma attacks to-night. Then we can face him together, and know the result."

The two Frenchmen being utterly worn out, he forbore to suggest their going at once by moonlight; over which forced delay she secretly exulted.

As they sat together upon what would probably be their last night on the island, watching through an aperture as they had done two years before, his heart, too, was rather full. It is ever the woman whose quickness of perception grasps a point first in its entirety, while the man is working through the details. The crowded events of the day: news of the world of action, with its revival of old interests, the delight of the aviator in the touch of a machine once more, the preparation of schemes for thwarting a native attack and insuring Barbara's safety, had engrossed him to the extinction of other emotions. Much as he loved his life of nature, its scope and possibilities were limited for a man of enterprise. His zest for old activities began to revive, as he talked with De Borceau.

Now he, too, realized vividly the loss as well as gain which faced them. Stepping back from the window, he sat beside her on their ingeniously contrived bed, in silence; but the sudden clasp of his hand told her more than words; and she returned it, unable to restrain the tears.

The stillness around was intense. Now and then it was broken by the cry of a child, quickly hushed again.

Within the palisade, the black forms of the men lay close to the ground, with here and there a pair of eyes watching, sentinels, between the stakes. Another small party lay ambushed in the scrub on the hill rising beside the hut—the idea being to waylay the enemy, should he come that way, or to fall upon the waddling forms as they approached down the bay by the usual route; thus drawing them into battle away from the hut and the women and children. Babooma's strength numbered about the same as their own. With the two Frenchmen to protect the girl from treachery, Croft felt pretty confident over the result of any night attack. Well aware of the black chief's desires for her, he had warned De Borceau of this danger.

"If things go against us and you see me bowled over, don't wait—don't risk a moment—go!" he had insisted, "even if it means physical force!"

And De Borceau, like many another, found himself following this man's behests, with a zeal and fealty inspired solely by personality. He swore obedience to the last letter.

Laying his cheek against hers, Alan became aware, in the moonlit darkness, of the tears upon it.

"Not crying?" he whispered.

She buried her face in his shoulder, saying nothing.

"It has been very beautiful," he murmured, stroking her hair.

Trifling memories fraught with much meaning rose in both their hearts; tiny incidents, themselves of no particular purport, humorous little scenes together—all of which would soon be but fragments of a receding dream —moved like a panorama through their minds. Both had felt deeply here: the deepest chords of their lives

had been sounded in this small island. It is ever the environment where the depths have been stirred which grips the heart. Other places, however transcendent their beauty, never become so dear. The ugly back street where a man and maid first kiss and avow their love, will always appear more lovely, in their eyes, than the blue lakes of Italy, or Switzerland's snow-capped peaks. . . .

"We will come back—some day," he consoled her presently.

"Yes, yes!" she urged eagerly. "Often, Alan!"

Then they began to plan their future—picturing the journey together to England, the greetings, the meetings with those who thought them dead. . . . And ever the man's keen eyes watched the shadowy scene without, his ears alert to every sound, as they had been on that other night long ago. . . .

Presently, as before, he leaned quickly forward. For again the faint sound of breaking twigs had reached him. . . . Again, near the outskirts of the palm grove, he had caught sight of a shadowy form.

Barbara rose with him, aware without words that the moment of desperate action was upon them; glad of it, since now she could face the danger with her man.

"I must go," he murmured.

For a moment she clung to him. "Take care!" she whispered passionately. "Oh, my dearest, do take care!"

Gently he disengaged himself, and kissed her.

"I shall be all right. Go to the women, Barbara, and keep them indoors." He hurried to the entrance; then turned back again. "Don't forget, if—— Trust yourself to De Borceau if——" Not finishing the sentence she dreaded to hear, he once more turned to go.

A tiny choked exclamation escaped her lips. He looked quickly round. Swiftly, with a sudden passionate movement, he seized her in his arms, straining her fiercely to him; then, as swiftly, he released her, and she found herself alone.

. . . . . .

The task of keeping the women within the comparative safety of the hut proved no sinecure; sometimes it was only achieved by sheer physical force. The greater the noise without, the higher rose the pandemonium within. Children cried; women wailed and shrieked, their fear of the two white strangers almost equaling their fear of Babooma. Only the presence of Barbara, with her extraordinary calm, succeeded in maintaining a semblance of order. Her coolness was unnatural. The Frenchmen marveled, as they watched her. This was no hard-featured, bold-eyed Amazon; yet they saw no trace of highly-strung nerves held under with iron control. When the din outside came nearer, proving Babooma to have forced his way through the distant ambush; when frequent arrows or spears hurtled through the air and buried themselves in the frail bamboo, or even pierced their way to the rooms within, only a more rigid set of her lips was noticeable, a more determined light in her eyes.

The battle waged long and furious. For a time the men hidden on the hillside, after surprising the little army wriggling down the bay, kept it fiercely engaged, away from the hut. But gradually, to the girl's strained ears, the wild struggle seemed to draw nearer. . . . Presently, as she could tell by the excited yells close by, those men guarding the hut itself were attacked. . . .

The lust for blood, every primitive instinct in the savage, was roused on each side: the fight would be

to the death. No mercy would be shown until one or the other of the parties was completely vanquished. Like mad snarling dogs with foaming mouths, they grappled and fought—blood-stained, wounded, but never relinquishing their maniacal fury. That Alan was in the thick of the hideous hubbub Barbara knew full well. What might be happening to him she dared not pause to think. . . . The hell of hate had been opened and its demons let loose, as it had been opened in civilized lands not long before. Then the innocent barbarians had suffered from its echoes; now the reverse was the case. . . .

The fighting blood of the Frenchmen tingled within them; they fingered their extraordinary, clumsy weapons, impatient to hurl themselves out into the fray—yet instinctively submitting to their orders, realizing the wisdom of the leader who had appointed each man his task with supreme insight into detail. . . .

Soon the uproar raged round the palisade. Every now and then, a crashing, ripping sound was heard, proving portions to have been burst through and trampled down. The scuffling feet, snorting breath, muttered cries, blood-curdling shouts and yells, were close. . . . Penetrating the bamboo walls came venomous spear-points and sharp arrow-heads, sometimes piercing the shoulders of those standing near. . . . The women grew demented. . . . Barbara tried, unsuccessfully, to keep as many as possible in the central hut, where only the two end-walls were exposed to the weapons; these points the Frenchmen guarded, ready for any onslaught. . . .

Simultaneously, with dramatic suddenness, three things happened to end the terrible period of waiting.

With a startling crash, the outer wall of the sleeping-hut gave way, and in surged a fighting medley of black

figures. . . . From the other side, or kitchen, a cloud of smoke and crackling flame arose. . . . The hut was on fire!

All power of restraining the women was past. As the Frenchmen dashed forward to meet the intruders on one side, and the black smoke bellied in from the other, they turned with one accord, struggled madly in their stampede for the main entrance, then streamed out—wild with terror—into the cold gray of the early dawn. . . .

At the same time, from without, amid the general hubbub, one loud wailing cry arose, in a mixture of native and broken English tongues—a frightened, agonized cry: "The white chief; A-aa! a-aa! The white chief! . . . The white chief! . . . A-aa! a-aa! a-aa!"

It reached the ashen-faced girl within . . . and of that alone was she conscious. The roaring flames and blinding smoke, the struggling black men and shouting stream of women, faded from her eyes. Her work was finished here, and she never hesitated. Without a backward glance, she drew the revolver from her belt and dashed outside. . . .

The little garden was a trampled ruin: the broken stakes of the palisade lay about the ground, tripping up unwary feet. Looking neither to right nor left, she fled round the hut in the direction of that rising ominous wail. . . . A jumble of dark forms heaving, retreating, closing up again like a swarm of bees, was all she could at first distinguish, in the faint light. . . . Then, suddenly, in a momentary clearing, two figures showed distinct—one white, one black—locked together in a death struggle, each dripping with blood, fiendishly intent to kill. . . . They vanished again among the mass of their supporters. . . .

As she ran, gasping, up the slope, she paid no heed to her own danger—was unaware of both black and white men from the hut following in hot pursuit. . . . Again the dense medley parted before her eyes. At the same instant a spear sped through the air. Whizzing angrily past her, straight at the two struggling forms, it flew with unerring judgment and buried its hideous point in the white man's back. He reeled, loosed his antagonist, threw groping arms wide. With a demoniacal cry of triumph, Babooma made a spring. . . .

As twice before, a sharp report reverberated, and the seething mass was momentarily obscured by smoke. . . .

A pair of black hands grasped the girl's arms as she tottered backward, dropping her smoking weapon. For a brief instant she recognized Roowa's face, which seemed to merge into that of De Borceau; then her senses slipped from her, and everything faded into oblivion. . . .

Not knowing friend from foe, the struggle for her unconscious body was sharp and furious. But the two Frenchmen were fresh and uninjured; and Roowa's supporters had rushed on, in wild distress, to that other seething heap. . . . Just one glimpse of two prostrate forms being hoisted, amid a frenzy of fighting, wails and shouts—and the two white men devoted themselves to their oath. . . .

On trembling knees at last, bleeding, helpless, his cries drowned by the noise around and the roaring flames from the hut, Roowa watched the strangers seize the inert form of his white chief's wife, and disappear toward the coast. . . .

The thick fighting mass had dissolved into odd struggling groups of twos and threes; the prostrate forms had disappeared. Away near the palm grove could be

seen a quickly vanishing crowd of dark figures. . . . The flames belched forth from the burning hut, overcoming the early daylight. . . .

Presently the steady monotonous drone of retreating engines blended with the rising wind of the dawn.

PART FOUR

BROKEN HARMONY

I

Miss Davies placed a marker in her book; then laid it down upon a small table. Her face assumed the complacent expression of one about to perform a pleasant duty in accordance with her conscience.

"I think," she observed decisively, "Hugh should be warned."

Mrs. Stockley glanced up from the stole she was embroidering. "About what?" she asked.

"Barbara."

Her sister made a gesture of annoyance, which caused her to prick her finger; this increased her irritation.

"I wish you would for once be explicit, Mary! You have thrown out dark hints about Barbara ever since we heard of her rescue. Why should Hugh be warned?"

Miss Davies leaned forward and poked the fire into a more cheerful blaze, feeling a smug sense of comfort in its warmth as she listened to the wind howling outside. Sitting back in her chair, she met the other woman's puzzled look with one of kindly toleration mixed with contempt.

"Are you so stupidly dense as you appear, Alice? Or are you wilfully blinding yourself?"

"I am no more stupid than the rest of my family, I hope!" snapped Mrs. Stockley, with much meaning.

"Well, then," continued her sister, ignoring this improbability, "you must realize that Barbara will most likely return—very changed. Indeed, from her one letter there seems no doubt about it. That was queer—very queer!"

Mrs. Stockley impatiently hunted among bundles of colored silks. "Of course she will be changed. She is two years older and has suffered ghastly experiences. She was very ill at Singapore: you couldn't expect long chatty letters!"

She spoke with unusual asperity. Two years of her sister's undiluted companionship had increased an inherent instinct toward contradiction, while developing a self-defensive alertness. Both were necessary in the radius of two sharp eyes ever quizzing through their lorgnette, two ears which seemingly reached all over the house, and a caustic tongue ready to reduce other people's foibles or few ideas to shreds. Such gifts used at the expense of common acquaintances are a different matter, of course. . . .

Miss Davies, having renounced her worldly life for her sister's sake, never allowed the fact to be forgotten. She rose now, and turned up the pink-shaded lamp standing near.

"Martha trims lamps shockingly!" she complained. "They never give enough light, and usually smoke."

"None have smoked this winter, yet!" snapped Martha's mistress, without reflection.

"Your memory's going, Alice! This one smoked last Sunday week. Well-managed lamps are painful enough to one accustomed to the comforts of town life, without——"

"Well, Mary, if you want to return to your town life, do so! I have often begged you not to consider me."

This was true—since hearing of her daughter's extraordinary resurrection.

But Miss Davies was in no hurry to withdraw her feet from the comfortable fenders of Lake Cottage. She was established now in Darbury, with a little circle of choice friends among whom she queened it darkly as a "Woman who knew the World."

"I suppose Martha has too much to do," she tactfully conceded.

"After to-morrow, Bab will be here to help her as usual," Mrs. Stockley replied with comfortable satisfaction. "She will attend to the lamps again."

"Ah!" Miss Davies returned to the promptings of conscience with renewed relish. "She may not be so willing to be an unpaid housemaid now! You are as blind as Hugh, Alice. I saw him this afternoon, quite excited over meeting her to-morrow. He wants to have the wedding after Christmas . . . of course it was not my business to say anything!"

Whether this self-discipline could have been maintained had not other people been present, is open to question. . . .

"You don't understand Bab as well as Hugh and I do, you see," returned her sister complacently.

"No," she agreed, "but I understand Man!" Her lips closed with a snap, to give effect to the world of meaning in her words. "Don't you realize, Alice, that Barbara was attractive? And she has been flung, unchaperoned, for two years, into the society of a man who —well—had extremely loose ideas, and Bohemian ways! —a man whose influence would be most questionable for any young girl."

Mrs. Stockley flushed. "Are you insinuating that Bab

would be weak enough to allow him to influence her? After her careful upbringing, too? Why—looseness of any sort would be abhorrent to her! Her surroundings have always been strictly moral."

"I don't insinuate anything; but I wouldn't trust *that man* far, in such circumstances! We have yet to learn how he behaved."

"She did not allude to him in her letter."

"No. But—she did her utmost to get taken back to search for his body! Surely her chief desire should have been to hurry home to Hugh?"

Mrs. Stockley smiled impatiently. "You are making mountains from molehills, Mary! She did that purely from humanitarian motives; it was only right and natural. Hugh thought so. He liked Captain Croft."

"Hugh is too trustful: that's why I am sorry for him. Frankly, Alice, I do not believe a man and woman could live in such isolation without coming to grief. I have seen too much of human nature——"

"My dear Mary! what do you mean? You don't——"

Her sister held up a dignified hand to stop all interruption. "You *must* face it, Alice! Everybody is talking and wondering. Of course, it depends entirely upon the man. I don't imply that all men are beasts—as some women would who had seen as much of the world as I have. If he had a strong spiritual nature—a clergyman, perhaps. But *that* man!" She pursed her lips.

Mrs. Stockley gazed at her, her own face paling, her finger twitching the forgotten stole.

"'Coming to grief!'" she repeated, horrified. "Do you dare suggest my daughter would so disgrace her name and family as to allow—— My dear Mary! it is preposterous! I would disown such a child. But Barbara!

Why, I would trust her alone with any man, for forty years! She wouldn't dream of such things. Besides, Captain Croft was Mrs. Field's cousin, of good family himself——"

Martha hustled in at this moment with bedroom candles. She plumped them down upon the table, and her old face beamed at an excuse for garrulity over Barbara's return. When, snubbed, she departed, Mrs. Stockley faced her sister, candle in hand, with an air of outraged dignity.

"Mary," she said, "your conversation to-night has shocked me inexpressibly! I insist on your never breathing a word of your suspicions—either to Hugh or Barbara. If she has any—painful memories—she will confide in me. Of course, I did not know Captain Croft well, nor like him; but—poor child! Her sufferings may have been worse than I ever imagined."

Miss Davies lit her candle, then threw the match into the fire. A little mysterious smile hovered over her face.

"Of course I shall not say anything to Barbara. But I shall soon know, without being told! Her memories may not be painful. That type of man can become very attractive to young girls if he chooses. . . . I should not be surprised if——"

"I don't wish to hear any more. You have a most suggestive mind, Mary, which is extremely unpleasant at times. Good night!"

With unusual decision she opened the drawing-room door, and went to bed. But she lay long awake thinking over her sister's remarks. One alone stood out clearly, gathering force with every minute: "Everybody is talking and wondering."

Wondering—what? What vile insinuation lay here? And about her family! No surer way could have been found of dropping poison into Mrs. Stockley's mind. . . .

Darbury certainly was thrilled. It seethed with curiosity and the self-importance engendered by unexpected publicity. During the war its sons and daughters, although playing their parts well, achieved nothing especially noteworthy to bring the little backwater into prominence; whereas the disappearance of Croft's expedition caused it to leap at one bound into notoriety. Newspapers overflowed with the tragedy. Reporters, photographers, curious idlers, flocked to Darbury. Relatives of the ill-fated passengers were interviewed, photographs taken of their surroundings. . . . Little else was talked about at dinner-tables, over tea-cups or garden-walls, throughout the land. But gradually, when all search for remains proved fruitless, new topics of absorbing interest arose, and the public forgot.

Now, with dramatic suddenness, De Borceau's news had flashed across the globe. The world remembered again, and gasped. This was more absorbing than the modern problem novel! In fact, it was one in real life. A man and a girl alone upon a desert island among cannibals! Who could say adventure had perished with the war? Here was food for romance—drama——!

Everybody eagerly devoured all scraps of news; but the supply was scanty. After being brought to Singapore, the heroine remained there, ill, unable to be moved for a time. . . . A certain reticence surrounded this illness, prostration being given as the natural cause. No trace of a white man's body was found by the expedition sent, post-haste, to search the island. Only the charred remains of a hut, and a few dead natives, were discovered

in the north. In the south, a small tribe of furious, armed savages offered a wildly hostile reception, making approach difficult, refusing any information other than a poisoned arrow. . . . Babooma had presumably recovered and wreaked his vengeance upon the body of his late antagonist. . . .

When well enough, the girl had implored frantically, as one distraught, for facilities to return, herself, to search. This awakened a new interest, adding piquancy to the situation. But such quixotic madness could not be indulged by level-headed authorities. What could a girl accomplish where hosts of men had failed? No! The island had been thoroughly explored. The hostile faction of the natives was in possession; her return would be mere suicide, or worse. She was sent to England as soon as practicable.

But the De Borceau brothers, ever thirsting for adventure, understanding perhaps more of her sufferings and the true facts than they chose to publish, carried out to the end their oath to Croft. Only on the boat did they bid her farewell—then they returned to their charts and their seaplane. Nothing save death, so they vowed to her, in their exuberant French fashion, should deter them from learning final news of the man whose personality had won their generous admiration. . . .

The key to more intimate, romantic drama was not forthcoming. Speculation flourished. What would be likely to happen in such circumstances? Would propinquity bring love in its train? And, if so——? This entailed endless discussion, heated arguments. What would be right, and what wrong? Which would need most courage: to resist or——? There were women who thought the reverse.

According to their own standpoint, people judged. The loose and immoral did not need to think; for them the situation held no problem—the result was obvious. To the strictly nurtured, narrow in their own righteousness, it presented little difficulty. The straight line, with Virtue on one side and Vice on the other, runs through every predicament and is clearly seen, in the limited scope of their imagination. . . . But, thank God! there are some to whom a wideness of vision is vouchsafed. They could find much for debate upon all points in this question.

The fact of the girl being already engaged shed a further glamour of the dramatic over the adventure, making the uncertainty all the greater. Perhaps no problem had arisen after all. . . . But if it had? Did the two themselves have clear convictions on either side; and, above all, courage to be true to them?

This was the vital point all longed to know. The pair became invested with romance. . . . Women laid their heads together and wondered. . . . Dark surmises were murmured concerning that illness at Singapore. . . . Sentimental girls forgot their matinée or cinema idols and cut Croft's photograph out of newspapers, half-wishing they themselves had been wrecked with him. . . . Zealous Christians such as Mr. Horne talked about the mercy of God, and the wonderful way in which things happened. Here was an unknown family of His children living in darkness, until two enlightened beings—one a clergyman's daughter with Sunday-school experience—were sent to give them The Word. . . .

The civilized public who never went further than Brighton, choked with opinions upon life on a desert island. Everybody had ideas. Well-fed fathers stood

before their fires, in their comfortable rooms, and held their families entranced with their own imaginary exploits in such circumstances. What huts they would have built, by gad! What boats! How they would have made "those damned savages" sit up! Not use firearms? Quixotic foolery! The blacks should soon have learned their places, damn it all!—or else been exterminated like vermin! . . . Very modern girls with much leg, no ankles, and yellow fingers—bad imitations of the men they professed to despise—seething with their own froth of intelligence, pronounced strong views upon all that was known of Barbara's actions. Their theories were invulnerable. Had they been there, "no nonsense" would have been stood from man, white or black. Their only problem would have been what they desired or did not desire. . . .

And, as the world in general talked, guessed, criticized, so did Darbury in particular. Miss Davies, being in intimate touch with the chief actors, was in her glory. To her, alone of those most nearly concerned, did outsiders dare to breathe their views upon the most delectable problem of all. In the presence of the Rochdales and Mrs. Stockley nobody had the courage to approach the topic holding so much spice.

Kindly, unsuspicious, happy in anticipation, the Rochdale home was full of simple rejoicing. It was left to Miss Davies to cast the seeds of doubt into her sister's unimaginative, self-centered mind. . . .

Meanwhile, through the darkness of winter nights and drabness of monotonous days, the ship plowed her way to England which bore one from the closed gates of an "earthly paradise," with agonized eyes still dazzled by the lights she had left there, to trim the little lamps of her Darbury home.

II

The boat-train was late.

Little groups of people, wrapped in heavy coats and furs, stood about the platform at Charing Cross chatting together; or promenaded slowly, eying their fellows with furtive interest, or absorbed in their own reflections.

The lonely young man with the shade over one eye became convinced that both the station-clock and his wrist-watch had stopped; yet the watch appeared to be ticking when, every few moments, he examined it. He sighed, turned on his heel, and for the twentieth time started to walk the length of the platform and back. Impatience was a novelty, also the state of excitement in which he found himself: he hardly knew how to cope with such sensations. . . .

All the roar of the huge terminus surrounded him. An engine blew off steam sharply; to the accompaniment of whistles, shouts, waving of hands, a lengthy train glided slowly out, with much self-importance, from a departure platform into the murky darkness beyond. . . .

Reaching the end of his self-appointed task, he turned and slowly retraced his steps.

Two years in his usual comfortable groove had changed Hugh very little. He managed his father's property, hunted, shot, played games, as of yore. If the tragic loss of Barbara had taken the keen edge from his enjoyment of life, making him a little older and graver, it had not destroyed his interests in the wholesome occupations which came his way. After the first shock had abated, he found himself a forlorn hero among his many friends, who took him to their hearts and filled his days so that brooding became impossible. Perhaps more than mere sympathy lurked within the minds of mothers with marriageable

daughters; but that suspicion never penetrated his brain. The girl who was part of his very life had gone: to none other did he give a moment's thought.

And now this twentieth-century miracle had happened! After what seemed a dull dream he awoke just where he was, when, so to speak, he fell asleep. His feelings were absolutely unchanged, except, perhaps, that they were intensified by loss. The possibility of any alteration in their relationship never even occurred to him. As has been mentioned before, he was not blessed—or cursed—with imagination. . . .

When he had nearly reached the barrier, a sudden tension became apparent everywhere: conversations ceased, heads all turned one way, a flutter of expectancy passed over the scattered groups. . . .

Hugh turned quickly. The huge engine, approaching, glided slowly alongside the platform, followed by the train which brought far travelers home again from distant lands. . . .

Within a few minutes all was bustle and hurry. The platform swarmed with excited passengers, harassed porters, barrows, luggage. . . .

He searched hither and thither for the figure he sought, anxiety slowly rising within him. As the crowd thinned, he took up his position just inside the barrier, where she was bound to come. Peering through the murky light, he hastily scanned each face that passed, without success. When at last but a few stragglers remained, he made his way farther down the platform a dull feeling of disappointment adding to his anxiety.

Casually his glance traveled over a thin figure in a dark coat and hat, seated upon a bench, a kindly, gray-haired porter standing near, suit-case in hand. . . . As he passed

by, a voice he had once thought never to hear again caused him to turn sharply, with a leap of the heart.

"I shall be better in a minute. . . . Thank you, porter. . . ."

"Bab!" With probably the quickest movement of his life, Hugh reached the seat and seized the girl's trembling hands in his own. . . . Then all other words of greeting faded upon his lips: he was conscious of a sense of shock, a nameless apprehension. The general features of the face quickly raised were those he knew; but that was all. This woman with the heavy, haunted-looking eyes, the strained set lips, the curious rigidity of expression, bore no resemblance to the sweet-faced, impulsive girl who had clung round his neck at parting, in the cabin of the aeroplane. He felt checked, curiously embarrassed, as if with a stranger. Still clasping her hands, he gazed at her silently, noting with alarm the ashen hue spreading even to her lips.

Several times she essayed to speak, and failed. The porter, scenting romance, discreetly moved a few steps away. . . . At last Hugh heard his name uttered, again and again, in a voice so charged with misery that his apprehensions deepened, and a sudden mistiness enveloped the surrounding scene. For she was clinging to his hands like one in deep torment who, for the first time amid a storm of suffering, finds the anchor of an old friend. . . . And yet he received the impression of fear in her manner; she seemed loath to meet his gaze, unable to talk to him. . . . He was frankly puzzled; but an Englishman, with his horror of scenes, can be trusted to bridge over any threatening chasms.

Sending the porter for a taxi, he sat down by her side, still holding her hands, and took refuge in the prosaic.

"Come and have some tea—or brandy—or something, Bab," he suggested. "There's just time."

She shook her head.

"But—you—you—dash it all! You don't look fit to travel. What is it, dear——?"

"I—shall be all right," she breathed. "We had a bad crossing. I—caught cold. That's all, Hugh."

He watched her with puckered brow. "What made you leave the boat at Marseilles and come overland?"

"I hated it!" she cried huskily, freeing her hands. "It was all—unbearable—day after day—the monotony, the people—oh! I hated it all!" Her eyes roved wildly over the platform, then she abruptly turned toward him. "I want Mrs. Field. Is she in London, or at Darbury?"

"Neither. She's in Russia."

The girl's hands twined convulsively together, and she said no more. It was a relief to both when the porter appeared to lead them to the waiting taxi. By this sudden act of traveling overland, she had successfully thwarted publicity. No curiosity was evinced in her arrival. She sank back in a corner, with throbbing head, bewildered by the noise around. It all seemed part of the nightmare which had been going on for so long, in which various parts of her anatomy moved, spoke, ate and slept, while she herself was numbed or dead. The movements around appeared as unreal and detached as the life of a gay city to one lying, blind and pain-stricken, in a darkened room.

Hugh turned to put his arms about her, as they drove away—but again something intangible checked him; instead, he took her hand once more, almost shyly, and leaned toward her. "Bab," he asked diffidently, "won't you—aren't you going to kiss me? After all this time?"

She drew away quickly, sharply. For a moment she laid her hand upon the door, with the mad instinct to escape which some trapped animal might feel on its way to the zoo, its heart ever away in the wilds with its lost mate. . . . Then, drawing a long quivering breath, she leaned back and looked up at him. In the light from passing vehicles, she saw the hurt wonder on his face, the affection in the one brown eye close to her, the grim shade. . . .

All at once the cold rigidity encompassing her heart relaxed. With trembling lips, and eyes swimming in sudden tears, she laid her free hand on his.

"Hughie!" she muttered brokenly, "you must bear with me. So much has happened. I have to tell you. . . . I—I'm not—I don't——" The words quavered away into silence. How was it possible, at this first moment of meeting, to blurt out the bald statements which would shatter his pathetic happiness and trust? She could not bear, yet, to allude to what had become a sacred memory full of poignant, exquisite pain. "I can't tell you everything—here," she continued. "Oh! I can't speak of it all—yet, Hugh! Don't ask me. It—it is so—unbearable——" Again her voice died away.

Hugh pressed the hands in his, and laid them against his cheek.

"Darling old girl! Has it been as bad as all that?"

He had, she knew, entirely misunderstood; but she made no comment. Explanations were impossible, just then. This meeting, fraught with such irony and tragedy, had bewildered her. Hugh's presence, with its present strangeness and odd sense of familiarity, brought with it a sense of shock, reducing her preconceived ideas of it to chaos.

Save for a few inquiries concerning her mother and his people, both were silent during most of the drive. Hugh was trying, in his groping way, to solve the riddle of this drastic change in the girl. Her experiences among savages, her illness, and two years' separation, would doubtless make things seem strange between them at first, he reflected sensibly. With patience on his part, all would soon right itself. Nevertheless, he was conscious of disappointment. He would have asked more, but she had shut the door upon all except surface talk.

When they reached Waterloo, she nerved herself to put the question she scarcely dared to frame—that which was her only interest in life at present.

"Has any news reached England—yet—from De Borceau?"

Hugh looked grave and shook his head.

"Of—Croft, you mean? No. Poor fellow! . . . I suppose—I say—Bab——?"

"Yes?"

"I suppose—I've sometimes wondered—was Croft quite—decent to you, all the time?"

A harsh caricature of a laugh jarred on his ears.

"Yes. Oh! Quite—decent!"

Hugh knitted his brow at her tone.

"You are sure? He—looked after you, I mean, and did all he could?"

"Oh, yes, yes! He—did all he possibly could."

"It was a beastly position for you both. Especially as you didn't like him——"

"Here's the station!" she exclaimed, with a quick breath of relief. The taxi drew up at the pavement, and a porter opened the door. . . .

The train was rather full; but the presence of others in

their carriage was a boon to Barbara. Hugh had sunk so far into the background that, in her recent anguish, the consideration of their position had held no place. Robbed with such cruel suddenness of both Alan and her future motherhood, there had been no room, in the bitterness of her heart, for thoughts of the empty years ahead. Every throb of the engines bringing her away increased the passionate craving to return—to search every nook and corner of the island for remains of the man who meant more than life to her; then to lie down beside them and die, herself.

But fate destined otherwise. With increased sense of desolation and hopelessness, she foresaw the trails looming in front of her—the misery she must cause, the lack of understanding she must face alone. Only the desire to reach Mrs. Field had reconciled her to this return; now that was crushed. . . . Bewildered with conflicting emotions, with burning throat and aching head, she crouched, shivering, in a corner of the carriage while Hugh wrapped his traveling-rug round her knees.

"You have caught a chill," he said in his old kindly, practical way. "I suppose you got used to a warm climate?"

"Yes." She met his concerned look full of affection, and something seemed to stab her heart. "You were kind to come to meet me, Hughie," she faltered.

"Kind? My dearest Bab! I—after two years—dash it all!" He leaned forward, ostensibly to close the window. "You—don't seem to realize what all this means to me—I'm rotten at expressing things, but——" His voice grew husky; as he dashed up the window he blinked rather impatiently, then sat back and resolutely plunged into commonplaces.

The train rushed through the wintry darkness. An elderly clergyman dozed in one corner of the compartment; two girls carried on a low-voiced conversation, interspersed with bursts of laughter, over the pages of their magazines. Hugh discoursed upon all the little mundane happenings in Darbury during her absence, and she was grateful to him. She learned that Major Randall and Daisy French, braving criticism and ostracism, had been married at a Registry Office soon after her own departure; that Sybil Burford's wedding with Tony Field had taken place with much fashionable *éclat,* about fifteen months before. Here Hugh flushed, stammered a little, then relapsed into silence, and she wondered why. Fifteen months ago . . . she puckered her brow in feeble reckoning: that would be about the time—— An intolerable, almost physical pain caused her to close her eyes as the vivid picture of another marriage, away on a wild hilltop, with streams of golden sunshine for its only *éclat,* rose before them. . . .

Thus, amid prosaic surroundings, hidden under unemotional exteriors, life's tragedies and comedies work out their scenes. The two girls, absorbed now in their magazine stories, were oblivious to the living drama, full of tragedy and bitter irony, being enacted but a few feet away. Whenever Barbara looked at Hugh, the ironic misery of this false situation was increased. To him, at present, things seemed only vaguely unsatisfactory. This he had accounted for in the obvious way; therefore, worrying was futile. . . .

"I shall soon know without being told," Miss Davies had said. And she did. By the time she had extricated her niece from the combined watery tendrils of Mrs. Stockley and Martha, and kissed her cold white face, she

knew! The girl greeted them all with a certain quiet warmth, lacking both effusion and emotion, which bore as little resemblance to her old impulsive ways as the forced smile and sunken eyes to a face distinguished by its serenity. Nobody returning to a longed-for home and fiancé would look upon them with those eyes of haunted hopelessness! No illness would leave those rigid lines of pain around a mouth ever easily wreathed in smiles! . . . "Something has happened," the woman of the world said to herself, watching in silence. What it might be, she was left to conjecture.

Mrs. Stockley, after the poison dropped into her mind the night before, regarded her daughter's island life as some terrible blot staining the clean pages of her existence, which must not be lightly touched upon. She felt self-conscious upon the subject, shocked and apprehensive over the girl's appearance. As usual, she took refuge in helpless tears. It was Martha, urged by Hugh, who, noticing the chattering teeth and clammy hands, suggested hot soup and bed at once.

"With a 'ot bottle," she added.

A contraction caught Barbara's throat, preventing speech. Everything was so familiar, so home-like; and yet—so intolerable! She allowed herself to be led into the well-known dining-room. Somebody removed her coat, and somebody her hat; then Hugh's voice uttered an exclamation.

"You've bobbed your hair, Bab! Why?"

Kneeling unsteadily before the fire, with hands stretched to the cheerful blaze, she was struck by the strangeness of this question coming from him—the indirect cause two years before.

"It—was—better short," she replied shakily.

"I hope it will soon grow again now," said her mother anxiously. "I dislike the craze for 'bobbed' hair; it's unfeminine."

The meshes of the net which had loomed near with the advent of the De Borceaus, appeared to the girl's distraught mind to be closing steadily round her. Like one struggling in vain to elude them, she staggered to her feet.

"Mother—let me go to bed! I feel too—ill——"

It was Hugh who caught her, as she stumbled toward the door. With Martha, he half-carried her up the stairs to her old room. . . .

And all through the night, as she tossed about, with wide feverish eyes staring at Martha fussing near at hand; where—hundreds of years ago, it seemed, she had blown out the candle upon her old home-life—vision after vision rose, full of exquisite torture, to her mind. . . . A night of delirious terror in a little, vault-like hut. . . . A fearful vigil seated upon upturned suit-cases, waiting in the dark for the natives' attack. . . . A pair of scissors and a shock of dark hair, from under which dear gray eyes laughed up into her face. . . . An early dawn, with a little tin key-ring. . . . Golden hopes of motherhood, dashed almost as soon as awakened. . . . Like a relentless panorama, detail after detail came vividly to life again, with, ever present, the buoyancy of a man's strong personality carrying all before it. . . . She pressed her lips passionately to that little circlet of tin, with a bitterness of grief too deep for the relief of tears. . . .

Down-stairs, Mrs. Stockley and her sister sat long into the night, talking, surmising, arguing. Ever and anon, the former damped the atmosphere with her tears.

"She is so changed—so changed!" she repeated at in-

tervals. "If people are already talking, I don't know what they will say when they see her!"

"She is sure to tell you, soon, all that happened," consoled her sister. "Then we can contradict any wrong suspicions."

"I am sure she has been ill-treated," moaned the other; "or why should she look so ill and miserable, now she has come home? I don't believe she was even glad to see me—her own mother! It seems so ungrateful. But Bab always was thoughtless and inconsiderate over my feelings."

"Why not ask her for the truth, to-morrow?" suggested Miss Davies, her curiosity difficult to curb. "Or shall I? I am more used to girls in trouble——"

"No, Mary!" said Mrs. Stockley, with quick anger at any interference. "I will not have you insinuate that she is one of—of your 'fallen girls,' like this! If she has suffered anything at—that man's hands, she will tell me, herself. I couldn't speak of it now. Besides, I wouldn't dream of forcing her confidence! After all, it may be only the result of her illness."

Miss Davies glanced at her, rather sharply.

"What was really the matter at Singapore, do you suppose?" she asked.

"Prostration. And shock. Don't you remember? Very natural, I am sure, after such terrible times."

Miss Davies drew in her lips, in her usual way when considering discretion the better part of valor, and made no reply.

III

Mr. Brent-Hewson's diet, when his wife was at home, consisted chiefly of bread-pudding. She prided herself upon her capability as a housekeeper who wasted

nothing. Beyond frequent applications of this particularly unsavory dish—in which all stale fragments of cake were likewise concealed—it was difficult to find any other outward and visible sign of her inward, theoretic grace. When she departed, they vanished, too; but the bills still flowed on at the same pace. Mr. Brent-Hewson once dreamed a beautiful dream in which an angel came and said to him: "Is it not more blessed to prevent than to cure, O Man?" Being inspired by the epithet, he repeated the dream to his wife, with the valiant suggestion of reducing the supply of bread. She lowered her newspaper, and fixed her pale eyes upon him, saying nothing. . . . Mr. Brent-Hewson shuffled his feet uneasily; then spilt his coffee over a clean breakfast-cloth, and alluded to the mild weather, wondering if there would be snow. Some dreams are best unrepeated. Life is a ceaseless education. . . . He therefore received invitations to dinner at hospitable places, like Darbury House, with genuine delight.

Mrs. Rochdale gave an annual local dinner-party before Christmas every year, over which she presided like a good-natured hen—clucking, with her Buff Orpington smile, upon the chickens pecking at the good things provided for them. Everybody who *was* anybody in the neighborhood received an invitation, so that the parties bore a singular similarity.

Fresh interest was aroused this year, owing to the expected presence of Barbara. So far, she had been seen by few. For a week a severe chill had kept her in bed, invisible to the curious eyes of those who buzzed around Lake Cottage. The more persevering, after her arrival down-stairs, spread interesting reports of the extraordinary change wrought in her looks and behavior.

Miss Horne was one of these. Being the vicar's sister, it was obviously her duty to continue calling until the "wandering sheep" (her brother's happy expression) could be seen. Miss Horne had been reading up the Pacific Islands with terrific zeal. Robert Louis Stevenson, encyclopedias, books upon natives and their ways —all had been devoured indiscriminately. She had strings of knowledge at her finger-ends concerning anglicized blacks and tropical vegetation. That the victim to be crushed by this intelligence had seen and known a tribe and a land in their prehistoric state, untamed by the hand of civilization, was overlooked. . . . She came away, uncomfortably crestfallen.

"Most extraordinary!" she confided to Mrs. Brent-Hewson, over their tea-cups. "It was like talking to an utter stranger! You would think she would enjoy recounting her experiences, and discussing the island with somebody who understands that locality. But no! She was vague and reticent to the point of rudeness!"

Mrs. Brent-Hewson agreed. She, also, had penetrated, with her dreadnought insistence, the girl's seclusion—putting her through a severe cold-eyed catechism concerning the probable commercial value of foodstuffs which the island might produce, also copra, cotton, etc., and the capacity of the natives for work and money-making. That money was unknown to them she refused to believe, it being the value by which she rated all things and people. She, also, had found it necessary to wrench out the information she desired (for a forthcoming lecture upon "Products"), much as a dentist wrenches out teeth.

"I wonder why it is?" little Mr. Brent-Hewson remarked mildly. He had always liked Barbara; she did not make him feel small.

"Man!" his wife replied, with no hesitation, but with inexpressible disdain (she had never forgotten a certain fête). "Some girls are like that—weak fools—let any man influence them!"

Her husband sighed, and liked Barbara all the more. A girl who could be influenced by a mere man seemed something rare and precious.

"Yes," agreed Miss Horne, smiling mysteriously. "I fear there is *something* behind it all! Miss Davies thinks so; and she ought to know."

"Ah, well! we shall see. Have some more tea? James! Pass Miss Horne's cup, please."

Mrs. Brent-Hewson never allowed herself to be drawn into discussions, or to give opinions, too soon. It was more dignified to maintain an aloof silence until facts were known or arguments decided. Then was the time to drop, casually, a few words to prove that her sentiments had been on the right side throughout. She was one of those who always read criticisms by eminent critics of plays and books, in order to know what line to take in conversation upon such things. "To err is human," which was perhaps why she endeavored to render herself immune from such a charge.

As James hastened from his seat to obey, Miss Davies' figure passed the window, on its way to the front door. Presently she entered, obviously seething under some tremendous agitation.

"*Have* you heard?" she asked, not waiting for preliminaries.

"What?" cried Miss Horne.

"The rumor that Sybil is leaving Tony Field is correct! Everybody in the village is talking! But I thought you might not have heard yet, up here."

"Oh, I always knew the rumor had some truth in it," Mrs. Brent-Hewson replied, with irritating superiority.

"Do you know why?" asked Miss Horne, putting down her cup lest she should spill her tea in her present state.

Miss Davies beamed. She enjoyed nothing better than a situation such as this, where she held the trump cards.

"Yes, I do," she said, pausing to take a hot tea-cake with exasperating slowness.

"What?" urged the vicar's sister impatiently.

"Divorce!"

After which cryptic reply she stuffed a piece of cake into her mouth, preventing further information while producing the effect of a good "curtain" in a serial.

"Divorce!" echoed Mr. Brent-Hewson, startled.

"Whose?" cried Miss Horne.

"Somebody named Scott—a major in Tony's regiment. He is going to divorce his wife, and Tony is the co-respondent! Apparently it's an old affair; for they stayed at the Savoy together, two years ago. Tony denies it; but their names are in the hotel register. Naturally, Sybil is leaving him."

"Who would have dreamed of such a thing?" cried Miss Horne. "He seemed such an exemplary young man."

"Ah!" remarked Miss Davies, picking up her cup. "You never know, with men! They are experts at deception."

"Perhaps Mrs. Field will return now, and take care of her own affairs instead of messing about among foreigners," observed Mrs. Brent-Hewson, who, only able to think personally, not often parochially, herself, entirely failed to comprehend those who thought nation-

ally. Not for the world would she have admitted jealousy of a woman whose work and personality were greater than her own.

"Barbara has had a letter from her. She is returning very soon," replied Miss Davies.

"Did she say anything about Tony?" asked Miss Horne.

Miss Davies had, reluctantly, to confess ignorance upon this point.

"Barbara is so changed!" she sighed. "It's quite difficult to make her talk at all. There's *something* on her mind. Ah, well! it will come out—— I met Miss Brown going to see her, as I came here."

Miss Brown had become, by now, the recognized local poet laureate. Her "Dewdrops" watered the earth. Whatever happened in Darbury inspired a lyric or sonnet of some kind from her increasingly fluent pen. She was wont to say that "soul atmosphere insists upon expression." As, during one period of her life, her poems chiefly concerned hopeless love, her biographer might therefore conclude that an "atmosphere" of unrequited passion had warped her sensitive soul during those gloomy years. She was known to have had what might be termed a negative proposal, at that time. A curate, with no chest to speak of but a poetic soul, had come to do *locum* work during Mr. Horne's summer holiday. Naturally, he and the poetess gravitated toward each other. One day on the lake, overcome by the setting sun and a distant gramophone, he had laid down the book of Browning's poems from which he had been reading and impulsively seized her hand. In tones of deep emotion he murmured broken wishes that they could marry. But, he had continued, if he were in a position to marry, there was another woman to whom he ought to

give the first refusal . . . he thought it only fair to tell Miss Brown this. . . .

Whether "this" caused the phase of love poems, was uncertain. She confided the episode to her bosom friends, with some pride; therefore it was soon known all over Darbury. To feel herself second upon a poetic curate's marriage catalogue was at least "half a loaf better than no bread"!

She fluttered in to Barbara, this afternoon, with a small volume resembling a prayer-book, bound in purple suède with black strappings, in her pocket. When she left, after an unsatisfactory half-hour of strained conversation, she thrust it into the girl's hands.

"It is the memorial poem I wrote for the *Lucky-Bag* after—when—we were mourning for you, you know!" she flustered nervously. "I thought you might like this bound copy." . . . And she hurried away.

Barbara sat and read the jingling verses of mournful eulogy upon herself and her companions—never so high in popularity as when considered dead! Croft particularly was invested with immortal, Galahad qualities quite unfamiliar to the girl who had loved him. Crude though it all was, one verse arrested her wandering attention, and she read it again:

Why are we given our friendships, and all our happiest hours?
To pass and die forgotten, like leaves in th' wild autumn bow'rs?
Not so! They are lamps on time's pathway, shining ever; the dimness is ours.

Closing the book, she gazed out upon the darkening wintry garden, the words ringing with little comfort in her head, conscious of the truth hidden somewhere

therein, could she ever reach it. It is easier to write of life than to live. Distant heights look so simple to climb.

To the girl, weak in health and tortured in mind, everybody and everything seemed unbearable. Perceiving the suspicious curiosity around her, she instinctively cloaked herself with reserve, throwing no intimate sidelights upon the vital point causing so much conjecture. News from De Borceau was all she craved, and she felt fresh anxiety concerning the lack of it. Had Mrs. Stockley's weak mind not been poisoned, making natural talk upon the island life impossible to her, things might have been vastly different for all. As it was, the topic became increasingly difficult of approach; until it assumed the character of something mysteriously *tabu*. Only the wreck and possible fate of Aunt Dolly were discussed. Croft's name was never even mentioned between them.

Urgent business on Mr. Rochdale's Devonshire property summoned Hugh thither before Barbara came downstairs. Still, therefore, the full explanation she intended to give him hung heavy on her mind, assuming increasing proportions the more she pondered over it. His horizon had been so contentedly bounded by conventional, orthodox views, that it might be difficult to make him understand the true case. She shrank from hurting him, from destroying his faith, as she knew she must do.

Mrs. Field's letter, full of the large-hearted, far-seeing sympathy so vital a part of her nature, brought a grain of comfort. There was only the briefest mention of the new trouble shadowing her own heart. Full of genuine grief and affection for her cousin, which she took for granted was shared now by the girl, there was no discreet avoidance of the matter. Being his nearest relative, she was kept informed of all proceedings concerning the

recovery of his body: the lack of information from the De Borceaus, with their possible fate, was, she said, causing renewed anxiety. She urged Barbara to use the "House on the Moor" and its library, whenever she wished, as usual.

Mrs. Stockley never encouraged—or believed in—invalidism other than her own. Once down-stairs, her daughter was expected to renew her old household duties and seek diligently to recover parochial ones. That she showed no inclination for either increased the sense of strain between them. Her shrinking from company would give rise, her mother dreaded, to further "talk." It was, therefore, strongly condemned. She found it impossible, as things were, to escape the ordeal of Mrs. Rochdale's dinner-party without hurting the kind old couple by actual rudeness. Having decided that Hugh must be told the truth before any one else, she was obliged, though shrinking in every fiber of her being, to dress in one of her old evening frocks and be fetched in the Rochdales' big car. . . . This had been one of her few treats in past years. . . . As she listlessly finished her toilet, the poignant pain of it all struck her afresh. . . . The reflection of shadowy, sunken eyes and aureole of dark hair mocked at her, in the large drawing-room mirrors. . . . The unconscious irony of the conversation, the kindliness of Hugh's parents and their delight over her, his own affection, were all unbearable torture. . . .

He had only returned that day, and she spoke to him in desperation, as they went in to dinner together. "Hugh!" she whispered, "I must see you alone, to tell you——"

"I know!" he broke in eagerly. "I'm dying to hear

everything! It was a beastly nuisance having to go away just then; but it couldn't be helped. Afraid we shan't get a chance to-night, though."

"To-morrow, then? Hugh, I *must* see you alone to-morrow!" There was a passionate urgency in her voice, a tragic pleading in her eyes—both signs which he entirely misunderstood. A flush overspread his face, and he pressed her bare arm to his side.

"Bab, darling!" he whispered, "don't you think I'm just longing to be alone with you, too? I—I counted the hours until I got back, to-day!"

Barbara sat down at the table, her heart like lead. She felt like a murderer who, about to drop poison into the cup of a trusting friend, talks and smiles upon him the while.

Mr. Horne's enthusiasm over the missionary results of this providential visit to "children of darkness" (having a double meaning, this phrase was considered witty in Darbury), broke loose almost in the same breath wherein he concluded grace. He was not among those whose importunity had been crowned with success where seeing the "wandering sheep" was concerned.

"I am so deeply interested in your work among the natives," he began, his clear clerical tones arresting everybody's attention. "I gathered from the papers that you obtained a wonderful influence over them?"

"Weren't they awful creatures?" put in Hugh, with a grimace. "I wonder you weren't scared stiff, Bab!"

"I was at first," she owned. "But I grew very fond of them."

"Capital!" beamed the vicar. "Our brothers, in spite of difference in color. Doubtless they responded to your affectionate overtures, poor souls?"

A vision of Alan's affectionate overtures with electrified wire, flashing eyes, and fearful rhetoric, until his brothers became responsive, brought the shadow of a smile into her white face, which old Mr. Rochdale saw and answered.

"I imagine Croft got 'em under more by bullying than affection; didn't he?" he laughed. "That wireless stunt was a brainy notion! I suppose he had to whip up the lazy beggars pretty hard afterward, to make 'em work?"

"No," she replied, aware of many eyes upon her face at this open allusion. "They loved him and obeyed him because"—her voice faltered—"because he had the personality to command obedience. He inspired them to work for their own good. They learned cleanliness; and we taught them to talk a little English——"

"Capital! capital!" The vicar beamed again at her, through his pince-nez. "How did they receive the Word?"

"Wonderfully quickly," she answered, misunderstanding. "Some of them could talk quite fluently in a very short time——"

"But the Word? How did they receive the Gospel?"

"Oh! We did not attempt to disturb their own religion."

The vicar gazed at her, aghast, as did most of those present. "You mean——" he began, "you can't mean that you neglected the first opportunity of giving them the Truth?"

"Yes," she said calmly, "if you look upon it in that light. We thought it unwise, for many reasons. For one thing, we had to play upon their superstitions to insure our own safety and obtain any influence at all. It needed great wariness."

"But surely," he remonstrated pedantically, "at the risk of one's life one should carry on the Gospel? Missionaries have to risk——"

"We were not missionaries!" she reminded him sharply. She looked impatiently at his self-complacent, horrified face and short-sighted eyes. "We tried to encourage them in cleanliness, gentleness, and consideration. Isn't that all part of the Gospel's real meaning? To have stuffed entirely new doctrines down their throats would have been ridiculous!"

Quick startled glances were directed upon her from all directions; the "Negatives" present flushed uncomfortably; Mrs. Stockley tried, ineffectually, to fix her with a stony eye; and Miss Horne came gallantly to her brother's aid.

"Apparently your success was not very great," she observed tartly.

Old Mr. Rochdale hastily smoothed over possible trouble by inquiring concerning the personal character of the natives.

"They are very simple and real," the girl replied warmly. "You find the same fears and jealousies and faults as everywhere else; but they are not hidden by any thin veneer of civilization. When they love or hate, they do so openly."

"I hope," remarked Miss Davies, not much liking her tone, "you made them wear decent clothing?"

Miss Horne regarded her rival in intelligence with superior contempt. "Where on earth would she get the clothes?" she inquired disdainfully.

"Most of them were naked," said Barbara; "some wore a little matting."

The "Negatives" flushed redder, and everybody

rather hurriedly went on eating. Hugh hurled himself into the silence, thinking to change the subject.

"What did you do about clothes, Bab? Did your own last out?"

"Fairly well. I made some breeches, and wore them."

The vicar coughed; Mr. Brent-Hewson spilt his salt and asked Miss Brown if she liked snow; Mrs. Stockley refused her favorite game in her embarrassment; the "Negatives" resembled scarlet geraniums by this time. . . . Mrs. Rochdale remarked tactfully: "Dear, dear! Isn't it all like a novel? If you had been there, Hugh, it would have been really romantic!"

Hugh laughed. "I shouldn't be much good on a desert island," he observed modestly. "Must have been beastly uncomfortable."

"I bet Bab often wished you were there!" smiled old Mr. Rochdale, in his genial way. "Only she won't own it. Now, Hugh, make her confess!"

But Hugh's glance had fallen upon the girl's left hand, and he did not reply.

"It must have been difficult," remarked Miss Horne, stepping in where no angel would ever tread, "to prevent going mad from sheer boredom. The monotony, with only one companion, must have been awful! Could you find anything on earth to talk about, all the time?"

Barbara felt like one undergoing slow torture; her nerves seemed lacerated. It was the constant repetition of little drops of water which sent the condemned man mad. Conscious of her aunt's raised lorgnette, and the penetrating glance of the vicar's sister under cover of this apparently artless question, she laughed a little hysterically.

"Oh, yes! There was plenty to talk about."

"Bab," asked Hugh, "whatever are you wearing in the shape of a ring? Where is mine?"

Everybody craned forward, and she hastily withdrew her hand. It seemed as if curious hostile eyes were peering at something sacred, the only thing of value to her now in life.

"I—have lost your ring, Hugh. It was left on the island with everything else."

"And you are wearing that instead? I must get another at once. What is it? A key-ring?"

"Y-yes."

"Once," remarked the vicar, rising from his oblivion, "I had the case of a wedding-party forgetting the ring; and I married them with a key-ring!"

"Really!" asked Miss Davies. "I suppose it is quite legal?"

"Quite! Provided, of course, that everything else is in order and a priest performs the ceremony."

Barbara's right hand closed convulsively upon her left, under the table.

"The impotence of the situation must have been appalling when your wedding-day arrived," Miss Horne observed, watching her narrowly again. "Weren't you nearly demented?"

"I felt simply rotten then," murmured Hugh.

Barbara's clenched hands opened and closed again. "Curiously enough," she replied, with forced lightness, "that was the only day on which we saw a ship!"

Miss Horne's insight into deep matters being slight, she sought, like many of her type, to cover this deficiency by vaunting her knowledge of obvious externals. This sort of thing never fails to impress some people. . . . She took the opportunity she had now secured of con-

tinuing the conversation which had previously failed, by putting Barbara through a kind of geographical and geological examination, in which her own intelligence would shine as the morning star. She found herself quite able to argue facts, and even to answer the queries of others on behalf of the girl: which was so typical that the ghost of the latter's old impatience revived. But when you have heard the roar of lions, you do not heed the buzzing of flies. They only seem a foolish nuisance.

Miss Davies inwardly fumed, searching wildly for an opportunity to crush this belated star and rise from obscurity herself like a dazzling sun. She made several attempts, but the star refused to wane; in fact, it grew yet brighter, launching forth—with glittering eyes and shining pince-nez—into a dissertation on the palolo.

Then the sun, so to speak, pricked up its ears.

"The palolo," replied Miss Horne, in answer to somebody's query, "is an annelid. It rises, for propagation, to the surface of the water in October or November, and divides——"

"Ah, yes!" interrupted the sun, shooting a beam from her rising glory, "I have read about that, too, Miss Horne! Very interesting. The description is in that book by—by—what's his name—in Hillbeak Library; isn't it?"

Miss Horne turned sarcastic, tolerant eyes upon her rival. "Is it?" she asked blandly. "I dare say. You have joined their Self-Education Branch, have you not? Such a boon for these unintelligent villages!"

"It is indeed!" agreed Miss Davies sweetly, with the proved superiority of a visitor from the World. "You have often told me how invaluable you have found it. I think your wife belongs, too, Mr. Brent-Hewson?"

He was so much startled at finding the lorgnette directed upon his insignificant person that he nearly spilt his port over his nuts. Mrs. Brent-Hewson was unavoidably absent, owing to a Christmas lecturing tour.

"Yes. Excellent! Most instructive!" he stammered, with guilty knowledge of the pile of heavy unread literature that day returned, surreptitiously, to the library shelves.

"When does she return?" asked old Mr. Rochdale, glad of a respite from Miss Horne's intelligence.

"Oh! not yet," he replied, rather too hastily. "Not for a week, I ho—think."

"What is she lecturing on?" inquired his hostess.

The little man was quite confused by so much unaccustomed attention. "I—er—I'm not sure! Something about the cause of Strikes, I think.—No! Eugenics?—No! Now, was it drains again . . .?"

"Products?" suggested Barbara kindly, with acute memories.

"Ah, yes!" He smiled brightly at the rare enigma influenced by man. "Products and their Cultivation. She lectures upon so many topics——"

"Yes, indeed," put in the vicar, nodding profoundly. "Wonderfully clever woman, with a wide range of knowledge! Tremendous powers of influence in her hands—'A light to guide, a rod to'—h'm! yes, indeed. . . ." He relapsed into deep thought, as if tracing her guiding influence down all the drains of all the ages. Then, as Mrs. Rochdale rose, he hurried to Barbara's side.

"We must have a little talk soon, Miss Stockley. Your work in the parish has been much missed: I am anxious to fix up your classes again——"

"I'm afraid, Mr. Horne, I can not undertake parish work, now."

He gazed at her for a moment, speechless. This "sheep" had certainly wandered far!

"But—but——" he began, then stopped, his mouth still open. With scarcely an audible reply, she had followed the other women from the room, leaving him staring after her. . . . He—the vicar—set at nought! What degeneration did a soul suffer when removed from civilized influences—above all, from the sacraments of the church! . . . Here was subject-matter for next Sunday's sermon. . . .

Mr. Horne relapsed into deep thought, while watching the other men drink their port.

IV

To Barbara, that evening seemed never-ending, her false position intolerable. She craved yet dreaded, the morrow when she could talk with Hugh.

Once by themselves, the women's tongues buzzed over their coffee-cups concerning the latest local scandal. She sat a little apart, but half listening to the stream of comments upon Tony Field's misdemeanors. Everybody now realized they had suspected Tony of underhand practises years ago! Could Sybil divorce him? Mrs. Field was pitied and much blamed for begetting such a son. In fact, Tony assumed at once the blackest of sheep's fleeces, Mrs. Stockley clinching the matter by remarking that it was "simply re-pre-*hens*-ible." . . . The verdict of a judge and jury would have been superfluous.

Mrs. Rochdale then proceeded with a garrulous account of a housemaid treasure, possessing all the virtues, in whose room four empty whisky bottles had been found,

during her absence on holiday! As she had been a frequenter of temperance meetings and had taken the pledge, this was in itself a terrible sin, even though she had never been seen drunk. Whether to allow her to return, or to write and denounce her forthwith, exercised her mistress's simple mind to the exclusion of sleep. . . . After much discussion, it was decided to ask the vicar.

A swift vision of Mrs. Field and her probable action in such a case rose to Barbara's mind; but her attention was arrested by an allusion to Major Randall. Here were others who, like herself, had struck deep chords entailing big decisions and convictions, upon which, rightly or wrongly, they had acted.

"Where is the first Mrs. Randall?" she asked involuntarily.

"The *first!*" echoed her aunt, whose views upon this subject were still adamant.

"Nobody knows," replied the vicar's sister carelessly. "Her co-respondent died suddenly, two years ago."

"Oh! Poor woman!" The girl's voice held such unusual warmth that Miss Davies looked at her through raised lorgnette, rather sharply.

"A providential punishment," she observed grimly.

"But—what did she do, then?"

Miss Horne shrugged disinterestedly. "Nobody knows," she repeated indifferently. "I heard she had gone abroad. Of course, nobody visits with the Randalls now. Even if they did, they could scarcely mention her. Oh!—I believe Mrs. Field was seen with her, somewhere. I forget where."

"How she must have suffered!"

Miss Davies raised the lorgnette again. "You take an extraordinary interest in her, Barbara!"

"I liked her. I'm sure she never risked and lost—all she did, without much suffering. She was always kind to people. Doesn't anybody know or care what has become of her?" She looked around rather hotly, but the thrust passed entirely off the armor of self-complacency encasing those who heard her words; and just then the men made their appearance.

The girl shrank into her chair, sick at heart, old talks with Alan in her mind. What key, she wondered, did these people use in substitution for the true one given to the world and lost again? "Charity suffereth long and is kind," they read glibly; or "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone." What did half the righteous souls, judging everybody in their own smug conception of Christianity, know of temptation, sin, the meaning of the word love with all its manifold sub-keys: consideration, understanding, sympathy? . . .

"My dear," broke in old Mr. Rochdale's voice, as he seated himself beside her, "we must bring back the roses into your cheeks!" He took her hand and patted it. "You mustn't brood over the past. It was a terrible experience—terrible! But it's all over now. Forget it, Barbara, like a bad dream, and cheer up again."

The words were, to the girl, like blades of steel thrust into sore bleeding wounds. "Over. . . . Forget!" . . . They seemed to reverberate in her mind, and her very soul turned sick and faint as, gripping the arms of her chair, she heard her mother's voice:

"Her time will soon be full again until her wedding, with all her old duties——"

Then Hugh came up and chatted, in his usual cheery way, and somebody played and sang. . . . But all the time those two words beat upon her brain. God! was

it true? Was this net once more to capture her? Was this nightmare to become the reality, and the splendid real—all the very essence of life—to fade into the dream?

That night the stupor of pain, which had enveloped her all these weeks, fell away like the effects of an anesthetic. These few hours of slow torture, culminating in kindly-meant words, tore it to fragments, leaving her in an agony of mind bordering upon frenzy. Once within the haven of her room, she blew out the light, as if unable to bear it, and threw herself, fully-dressed, upon her bed, moaning, her only conscious wish being for death to come and end the blank empty years stretching ahead. . . . Her heart rose up in rebellion at this wanton shattering of her life—this seemingly mocking hand which had hurled her away to a wilderness, given her the great keynote to tune it all to paradise; then, with such ruthless cruelty, had torn it from her grasp. . . .

She lay, in her inner and outer darkness, until the unsympathetic gray fingers of the wintry dawn roused her with their clammy touch. . . .

The morning was cold and bright. After a pretense at breakfast, she put on her coat, Hugh not being expected before lunch, and her mother not yet down.

A craving for freedom from stone walls, for vigorous action, had seized her. The cold air stinging her face, the wind buffeting her skirts, dulled momentarily the agony within. The lake glistened in the sunshine; here and there sprigs of ling still showed purple amid the russet of dead heather and bracken upon the common; the white sandy paths were crisp with frost.

At the corner where the lane joined the main road, she paused. Here, she and that other had first met. With exquisite pain, memories of those far-off first encounters

seethed into her mind. She saw again the half-mocking smile upon his lips; remembered his teasing words and her own annoyance, after speaking of her heart's desire. . . . She understood, as she turned hurriedly away, how, from the first, those keen eyes had read into her heart, penetrating to what she was but vaguely conscious of herself. . . . Her heart's desire? Ah, how changed it all was now—how changed! . . . Since treading last these familiar, heathery paths, a lifetime seemed to have elapsed. She looked back with wonder upon the inexperienced girl dimly yearning after an intangible something beyond the daily horizon. . . .

Presently she turned her steps to the house where so many happy hours had been spent. The garden looked deserted now, the tennis-court frostbound and dreary. But the housekeeper welcomed her warmly; and the few school-teachers installed there for Christmas holidays looked at her with ill-concealed curiosity. She hurried away, up to Mrs. Field's little den. Its owner being one of those whose arrivals ever had the charm of unexpectedness, the room had a cheerful fire and was fragrant with hothouse flowers. As Barbara looked round at the buff walls and deep-blue velvet curtains, the soft chairs built for comfort, and shelves stacked with books, other memories of confidential chats and cozy teas caused her again to realize the gulf yawning between herself and the girl of long ago.

She turned to the book-shelves, then walked restlessly back to the fire. . . . All at once she caught, with a little cry, at the back of a chair, as her glance fell upon the writing-table.

For the eyes she loved and had lost met her own, with the old straight penetrating look. . . . She ran forward

and picked up the photograph. He wore the uniform of an Air Force officer, and his face was set in the lines of dogged stubbornness when unpleasant business was afoot, which she knew well. . . . The vivid likeness was bittersweet.

"It's a damned nuisance—get it done!" She could almost hear the thought she read behind the grim lips. . . . Then, as she gazed upon the familiar features, all the past rose up and enveloped her: the comfortable English room faded. . . . Once more, in a far-away hut, she prepared strange food for her mate, ever and anon running to look for his return, seeing little black figures at play on the sand. . . . And presently he came striding down the sunny slope, fresh from a dip in the river, laden with fruit, his dear eyes searching for her. . . . She hurried to meet him, taking some of his burden. . . . Again she felt the warm touch of his lips, heard the laughter in his voice as he made some teasing remark. . . .

The ringing of a bell brought her sharply back to reality, the sudden cruel contrast cutting her like a whip. With a low moan she sank upon a couch, throwing herself face downward among the cushions, her lips pressed to the unresponsive portrait. Despair again clutched her in its remorseless claws. . . . She lay inert in her blind tearless abandonment, oblivious to all things. . . .

The opening door and quick footsteps crossing the room did not disturb her. At the touch of an arm about her shoulders she started violently and raised a drawn face. Hugh stood beside her, consternation in his eye.

"Bab!" he exclaimed, shocked by her expression. "My dearest! whatever is the matter?"

She sat slowly upright, the portrait still clasped with both arms, regarding him dumbly.

"I managed to get away this morning—Martha said you were here——" he stammered. "What is it, Bab? I—I thought something was wrong——"

It occurred to her that anybody less stupidly dense and unimaginative would have guessed the truth long ago. Then, swiftly chasing the thought, came the knowledge that it was his genuine simple trust in her and all his fellow-creatures which blinded him. Suspicion was as foreign to his honest nature as subtle changes were beyond his ken. She recognized, with a warm rush of sympathy, that her affection for this old companion remained unchanged; she alone was to blame for mistaking it for anything more, with the inevitable suffering she was about to cause. She stretched out her hand; and he took it in both of his.

"Hughie! Everything is—wrong."

"Tell me all about it," he urged, sitting beside her. "We can probably put things right between us."

She shook her head, with a catch of her breath; then drew her hand gently free again.

"I'm—I've got to hurt you—horribly. Oh! my dear! I can't bear doing it." Rising impulsively, she walked to the window and back, her face working with emotion. "Can't you—guess, Hugh? Can't you realize that—that—everything is different, now?" she cried, looking straight into his bewildered face.

Apprehension was spreading over his features. His brown eye, with its dawning sense of trouble, resembled that of a faithful dog not understanding the meaning of some unexpected chastisement. The girl could not bear to see it. She looked involuntarily down at what was still clasped to her breast. His glance followed hers, and the apprehension deepened.

"Guess—what?" he muttered. "What's that, Bab? A photograph?"

She nodded. He suddenly stepped toward her. "Whose? What—I—oh, lord! Tell me straight!"

It was the cry of one upon the borderland of tragic discovery. Feeling like an old-time executioner who let the ax fall upon the quivering neck of his victim, ending the hopes and affections of a lifetime, she silently handed him the photograph, and again turned to the window.

Looking with unseeing eyes at the frosty landscape, her thoughts reverted to a curiously similar scene in the past, wherein the situation was reversed. Hugh's portrait had played its part in that little drama. Alan, she remembered, had, with characteristic vehemence, torn it into shreds . . . then claimed her for his own, by the only bonds which constitute real possession of a woman. There may be other lawful ties, honorably recognized and adhered to; but, whether near in physical presence, or sundered by countless miles of sea and land, even by death itself, only the man to whom a woman's heart belongs holds her in true possession. None other can turn the key which unlocks the real fountains of her soul.

Hugh did not tear the cardboard to fragments. After a few moments' pregnant silence, he laid it upon a table and followed the girl to the window. His face was pale, and his voice toneless. "You mean, Bab, that——"

"I—I can never marry you."

He caught at a chair, but said nothing.

"I—care for you—as much as ever," she went on hurriedly, seeing the look on his face. "But—it was never love! I have learned that, Hugh. I know now——"

"You mean——?" he asked again huskily, as her voice faltered. "Croft?"

She nodded. The color ebbed still more from his cheeks, and he laid a hand on her arm. "But—my poor Bab! he is—dead——"

"Oh, I know! I know!" She clasped her hands in anguish. "But—you shall hear all the truth, Hugh—it is your due. He—I—he was my husband."

Hugh started violently and dropped his hand. She stood motionless before him. For several long moments the ticking of a little clock and the crackling of the fire were the only audible sounds. In his slow fashion, the man was trying, gropingly, to adjust facts.

"But——" he began at last, "I don't understand! You were only together a few weeks before the wreck. Where did you get—married? Why didn't somebody write? I don't understand," he repeated, bewildered. "I thought you disliked him."

She looked silently into his agitated face. It was evident that the truth was still far from his grasp.

"Hughie," she said very quietly, "it was impossible to write. We were not married during the trip—not until we had been on the island for—over a year."

He gazed at her, speechless, his bewilderment gradually changing to dismay and dawning horror.

"On the island? For a year?" he echoed. "But—how on earth could you get married——?" Suddenly the blood rushed to his temples and the horror grew and deepened. He caught her arm, gripping it fiercely. "You—my God! Barbara! you don't mean that you—*you,* of all people——and Croft——?"

Abruptly he swung her arm free, his face blazing as she had never seen it. "The swine! the—the rotten swine!" he choked, at a loss for words. "I trusted him. He gave me his word——"

"And he kept it," she cried quickly.

He faced her, something nearer to a sneer than she had ever seen curling his good-natured lips. "In what way? By betraying the greatest trust one man can put in another? By dragging you down——"

"Be quiet, Hugh!"

The anger in her voice silenced him. He turned away, dazed. Sinking upon the couch, he covered his face with his hands.

The girl was trembling with indignation. Her back to the room, she struggled with the hot anger seething within until her woman's understanding won the victory. Then she turned round.

"It was my doing," she said.

"Your—doing?" He sprang to his feet and walked about agitatedly. "What d'you mean? You were not the sort of girl to encourage—— For God's sake, explain everything!"

"He kept his word to you," she repeated. "He saved my life at the risk of his own. In every possible way he looked after my safety and comfort: nobody could have done more. Although he—cared—all the time, I never even guessed it! He—he thought I—belonged to you." She paused, shading her eyes.

"Then——?"

"Months went by, and no rescue came. Then—I—oh, Hughie, I couldn't help it!—I realized—I loved him, and —and he—knew it, too. . . . We meant to wait—and tell you. But months passed again, and—the position became impossible. You can't understand here. But there we had to face facts—quite differently from ordinary standpoints—to make our own laws. He left the decision to me. . . . At last, after months again of

struggle and—uncertainty—I became convinced that it would be right to make our own marriage, too——" She touched her finger. "This was the only ring he had."

Her words went into silence. A faint relief replaced the look of horror in Hugh's face. To an essentially clean-living British sportsman, the idea of wantonness between the girl he loved and the man he had trusted was unbearable. That hasty judgment was contradicted by her words. He could not, as she surmised, clearly comprehend the magnitude of the forces to be contended with upon the island, any more than a man learning swimming strokes in still water can realize the difficulties to be encountered, by the same movements, out in the open sea. But the simplicity of her explanation, offering no excuses, brought with it the force of truth. Evidently, however incomprehensibly, each had acted in accordance with deeply-weighed convictions. . . .

This was Hugh's first plunge into such complications: he was utterly lost, adrift from every mooring.

Barbara, watching him, half held out her hand.

"You must not think hardly of Alan," she appealed wistfully. "If he had not behaved honorably, I should not have—loved him—as I did. Surely you believe that, Hugh?"

Mechanically he took her hand. "Oh, lord!" he ejaculated. "What a mess it all is!"

"It's hell for me!" she exclaimed, a bitter agony in her voice that startled him. He looked at her strangely, amazed. This tragic-eyed woman who had suffered so much, learning to love with such fierce intensity, was far removed from his old girlish companion. He felt in a turmoil: full of pity for her, though still half-incredulous, chaotically uncertain of his feelings toward Croft. Drop-

ping her hand, he picked up the photograph once more. Then the full realization of his own loss—to be faced for the second time—surged up in his heart, as he looked at the pictured face. He put it down hurriedly, and passed his hand across his forehead.

"It's a—damned world now for us both, Bab! I—I'd better go—it has rather bowled me over——" He turned away, stumbling a little. "It—will be such a blow to the old people," he muttered huskily.

The girl watched him, helplessly, with aching heart. As he reached the door, she caught the suspicious glint of misery in his eye which seemed to break down all barriers. Her defensive attitude melted into sympathy, as ice melts at the touch of hot coals. In her old impulsive way she ran to him and seized the lapels of his tweed coat.

"Hughie!" she cried, tears raining unheeded down her cheeks. "Forgive me! I couldn't help it. It—it breaks my heart to hurt you like this."

His hands closed upon her arms, but he could not speak.

"I—couldn't bear to——betray your trust," she sobbed. "Believe me, Hughie, I tried not to—I tried to keep loyal to you——"

"Oh!" he interrupted vehemently, "don't make it harder! D'you suppose I should have wanted you to marry me from—duty? out of loyalty?" He paused, regarding her thoughtfully for a moment. "There's one thing, Bab——"

"Yes?"

"When you tell—your mother or anybody of—things—being over between us, don't mention your marriage! They won't understand, and it will be rough for you."

She threw back her head, with something of Alan's old arrogance, and drew away.

"I know you mean that kindly, Hugh; but it's impossible! It would seem as if I were ashamed. It would be implying that our convictions were wrong."

"People are not over-charitable about here, as you know," he urged. "You may both have acted according to your convictions, and they may have been right; but all the same it was—unorthodox, and——"

Barbara dashed her hand down upon a neighboring table, causing the things upon it to shake. "How is it possible to reconcile Darbury orthodoxy with a desert island?" she cried impatiently.

"It probably isn't," he agreed hastily; "but that's not the point. Few people will try. They will simply throw mud at you and—especially—him! Bab," he came back to her, speaking with unusual insistence, "I can't bear to think of you facing that! For my sake, as well as your own—and—his, don't tell them."

She remained silent. The truth of his words, as applied to Alan, struck her forcibly. The contemplation of his name suffering calumny had already, that morning, proved unbearable.

"It would be an awful trouble to your mother and my old people," he added, with his usual thoughtfulness. "They will be upset, as it is. And—they couldn't understand."

She suddenly turned and caught his shoulders.

"Hughie! do *you?*" she asked earnestly. "Ah! you *must!* I can't lose—your faith, too."

Then he acted in a manner that astonished them both. Passion and a sense of the dramatic had ever been far from his nature. Involuntarily, however, his fingers closed around her wrists. Raising her hands, he pressed his lips upon them.

"Heaven knows what was right or wrong," he declared hurriedly. "But—oh, my dear! God help you!"

The door slammed, and he was gone from her life—this man who had been friend and brother, playmate or lover, all her youth. . . . She stood gazing drearily through the window at the desolate tennis-court, where they had played so often together, and an extra wave of lonely bitterness swept into her heart. . . . She saw Hugh, with bent head, cross the grass to the garden-gate, followed by the faithful Shag. . . . Then she sank into a chair before the fire, crushed by an overpowering sense of physical weakness.

V

Darbury seethed and bubbled, and consumed endless tea, over the matrimonial troubles of two erstwhile parishioners, followed by the broken engagement of Hugh and Barbara. It is always easier to criticize other people's actions with the air of this soothing beverage. It seems to enhance one's own sense of respectability in a world of sin.

Nobody was surprised, of course! Nobody ever is on such occasions. Everybody knew that something would happen—which is always a safe conjecture.

But what everybody did not know concerning the latter thrill was the *real reason*. And herein lay the cause of the emptying tea-caddies. Unfortunately, Miss Davies was in London attending Christmas Meeting over "fallen girls," so the mystery remained unsolved. But the weed of suspicion grew into a lusty tree. Again, and in louder tones, the question arose: *What happened on the island?*

Mrs. Brent-Hewson—returning sooner than her husband had fondly dreamed—was untroubled by doubts. "Of course they acted like fools!" she said, puffing out a

cloud of cigarette smoke. "They had nothing else to do; and both of them lacked real intelligence." After which disposal of the matter, she replaced the cigarette, thrust her hands into her pockets, and gazed contemplatively at the ceiling. Real events of life were occupying her mind, it being the season of the killing of her pigs.

It was known that the Rochdales and Mrs. Stockley were deeply upset, the latter exceedingly wroth; but the two most affected kept their own counsel.

Miss Brown—as was but right in anything appertaining to romance—was the first to meet Hugh, and was delightfully shocked over his depressed appearance. She hurried to the vicarage to begin there her recital of the episode, while, with one of her inspirations deciding upon the first line of a new poem to be called *Blasted Hope*. . . .

The only ray of comfort to Barbara in her wretchedness lay in her aunt's absence. The relations between her mother and herself were of the coldest. Mrs. Stockley never forgot her position as a beacon, nor her Honorable Grandmother's gracious act in establishing her own identity with the county. This marriage between her daughter and Darbury's future squire had been her dearest ambition. Now, for no tangible reason, this ambition—revived with the girl's return—was hurled to the ground. Not easily could Mrs. Stockley view the dashing of her hopes. The scene between them had been stormy. She had wept, cajoled and upbraided, exasperated by the other's irrevocable demeanor.

"You are throwing away what many would give their eyes to possess!" she cried at last. "What will people say? There has been enough talk already. You confess you still care for Hugh——"

"Oh, yes, yes!" interrupted Barbara impatiently. "But that's not sufficient. It's not a woman's love for a man: that's quite a different thing. I know."

"Don't talk like a novelette!" her mother broke in querulously. Then, suddenly, her eyes narrowed and her thin face sharpened. "How do you know?" she asked meaningly.

Barbara was momentarily off her guard, not realizing her slip. The other woman pursued the advantage.

"Answer me, Barbara! I have not hitherto pressed for the confidence that was my due—in spite of the gossip which has come to my knowledge. You owe it to us all, now, to give an account of your life upon that island. Did anything happen *there* to cause this step?"

The girl stood looking down into the fire, uncertain of her reply, for a few moments. Her mother gave a little click with her lips.

"Ah!" she said decisively, "we thought so!"

"Thought what?" cried Barbara, turning sharply.

"That there had been some nonsense between you and that man, unchaperoned as you were."

The girl's eyes smoldered ominously, and she set her teeth. Her mother, exasperated by this reticence, continued with increasing anger:

"I ought never to have given my consent. I always knew he was an unscrupulous type of man—I never trusted him! But you at least should have known better, after your very careful upbringing. If his ideas were loose——"

"Stop, mother!" Her quick anger mounted. "You don't know what you are saying. He was the soul of honor. And because of it I—yes, I grew to love him with all my heart. I couldn't help it. I shall love him

until I die," she cried recklessly, throwing herself into a chair and burying her head.

"You mean to say," asked Mrs. Stockley sarcastically, "that it is 'the soul of honor' to take advantage of a girl's lonely position? To lure her from the man——"

"He did not!" She sprang angrily to her feet; then realized, too late, the wisdom of Hugh's warning.

Her mother laughed incredulously.

"Then you gave him your affection unasked? You behaved like a sentimental schoolgirl—threw yourself at his head, in fact?"

Anything was better than exposing Alan's name to the fate awaiting it if the truth oozed out. She caught at this straw, anxious to end the ordeal.

"If you like to think so. He certainly never—asked me to care for him. But I couldn't help it," she repeated.

Thus it was whispered from one bosom friend to another throughout Darbury that, during her sojourn upon the island, Barbara became the victim of an unrequited passion. This added spice to the mystery, while whetting curiosity. Did her companion never guess? Could any man, in such circumstances, be so blind—or so platonic?

Curious glances followed her; voices were lowered when she appeared; a constraint became obvious in her presence. . . . Well aware of it all, she threw it off with a shrug, scorn adding to the misery of her heart as she dragged through the days. Occasionally her mother forced the subject open again.

"If Hugh ever wishes to renew the engagement," she said once, "I insist upon your doing so."

"I couldn't possibly, mother!"

"Why not? The other man is dead. . . . You can't

ruin your life over an infatuation of that sort." . . . "The Rochdales are such old friends," she moaned, another time. "You don't consider how I miss them—how this all affects *me!*"

"But you can continue your friendship. Why not?" asked the girl, having grown unaccustomed to Darbury habits. This, however, was contrary to all custom; and a certain estrangement between the two families began, as a matter of course. . . .

These attacks were interspersed with other maternal disagreements. Perpetually some remark or action jarred the refinement upon which the Bishop-plus-Honorable's Granddaughter prided herself. Two years of emancipation had swept away all such gossamer cobwebs from Barbara's enlarged horizon. She expressed her views with a natural freedom which shocked everybody. Who could forget certain remarks at Mrs. Rochdale's party? Especially that brazen allusion to an article of apparel worn openly by men, but apparently unnoticed by women? Well—well! Over some things 'tis best to draw a veil. . . .

Excitements, like troubles, never come singly. The fates—or furies—having once turned their attention to Darbury, hurled down agitations. Ten days before Christmas, Major Randall met a tragic death in the hunting-field. It was Hugh who found him, and with ghastly face, helped to convey the broken body home to his distressed widow—thus again floundering in the flood of incomprehensible suffering, in what had once seemed the best of all possible worlds.

Kindly impulses now warred with outraged convention among those who had shunned the household. After two years' aloofness, could one call and offer sympathy? Ought one to do so? In many instances, the kindliness

latent in most natures might have triumphed, had not the vicar's vigilant conscience raised its head. After an estrangement owing to ineradicable differences of opinion during his lifetime, it refused to allow the Reverend Horne to bridge the gulf when this erring member of his flock lay dead. He decided, after deep and painful thought, that sin could not thus be swept aside and condoned. It would be a demoralizing example. It became his grievous duty to refuse to conduct the funeral service, as he previously refused to conduct the "mockery of marriage." His convictions were firm upon the increase of laxity and vice resulting from this mania for divorce sweeping across a degenerating world. The courage to act up to them was not lacking, and it brought him real suffering. The division of opinion among his friends, caused by this decision, was extremely painful; nevertheless, it inflamed his martyr-like sense of duty. Had it been possible, he would have denied burial in the Randall family vault. As it was, he went away for the day, the key of the vestry door in his pocket. This last act, by its childishness, spoiled among his admirers the effect produced by his strength of conscience. A burst of indignation arose; and the parish was "divided against itself."

A friend of the Randalls officiated—a kind elderly man who blew out most of the innumerable candles he found burning in the church. Hugh, pale and interesting as Miss Brown thought, and Mr. Brent-Hewson—his top-hat resembling, on his bald head, a thimble on a melon—followed their old sporting friend who had taken his last fence. . . .

Barbara, without considering Darbury's feelings in the matter, went to see the friendless young widow. It

was the first of many visits, which increased the breach with her mother. Mrs. Stockley could never differ from her vicar—to do so bordered upon sacrilege. She remonstrated, stormed, wept, finally forbade her to go to "that house." Then Barbara put into words the growing resolve in her mind.

"If I can't live a free life here, I will go away."

And Mrs. Stockley burst into fresh tears, crying that she was hardly used, bewailing her widowhood and the ingratitude of modern daughters.

The suspicions consuming every mind increased tenfold, emptying tea-caddies wholesale. This sudden friendship with one *tabu* in Darbury added fuel to the fire of doubt over an unrequited passion. Barbara found herself treated with still more self-conscious, stilted politeness, held further at a distance by all she met.

She tramped the common in all weathers, consumed with a restlessness that would not let her sleep, unable to find peace of mind in any occupation. Coming back from one of these tramps two days before Christmas, she noticed, in the gathering dusk of the short afternoon, a woman's figure standing near the lake, a small child in her arms. With a casual glance, the girl was entering the cottage gate, when she heard her name uttered low, like a faint exclamation. She turned quickly, peering with puzzled brow through the gloom; then recognition dawned in her face.

"Jenny? Jenny Grant!" She remembered she had not seen the girl since her return. "What are you doing, Jenny? Home for Christmas?" she asked kindly, presuming her to be now in service somewhere. There was no reply; and, aware of the shyness of such village maidens, she continued: "Where are you working now?"

"I—I ain't got no work, Miss Barbara."

The voice trembled on a sob. Barbara glanced at her quickly again, and realized the child's presence. A dim memory of one among the many choice morsels recently recounted for her own benefit returned to her mind. . . .

"Oh, Jenny!" she cried involuntarily; then stopped, as the girl, hiding her face on the sleeping child, burst into a passion of tears. Taking her arm, she led her to a seat placed near the lake, saying nothing until the fit of weeping had subsided. There was no need of words. In Barbara's face and heartfelt exclamation Jenny had read the knowledge she had learned to dread awakening, mingled with a sympathy she had never yet encountered. Of her own accord, at last, she began a stumbling explanation.

" 'E was a sailor, miss. . . . 'E was goin' to marry me, but was ordered sudden-loike back to 'is ship; an' then 'e—'e got the 'monia an' died. . . . But 'e would 'a' married me all right! 'E would!" She spoke with a defiance which the listening girl understood well. "We was wrong, I know," she went on, "but we was young an' —an'—partin', an'," with sinking voice, "I luved 'im! Oh, miss! I did indeed!" . . .

The hand on her arm tightened its grasp.

"Yes, Jenny. . . I know . . ." Then for a few moments she fell silent, reflecting upon the varied and extraordinary results—the high resolves and sacrifices, the impetuous, hot-headed folly, the loss of all principles—achieved by that "terrific force." . . . "What has happened since——?" She glanced at the child. "My aunt sent you to a 'Home,' I think?"

"Yes, miss. Arterwards I got work; but the baby

was delicate an' I couldn't 'ave 'im with me. An' it's bin the same all along. I've bin out of work now wi' 'im fur weeks, an' all me money well-nigh gone. So I cum 'ome to mother, an' she—she's turned me away." . . . The sobs broke out afresh. "I—dunno we're to go nor w'at to do . . . I wish I was dead! I was wonderin', there by the lake, if——"

"No, no, no! Don't say it, Jenny! We—we'll think of something." Perhaps it was more than natural aversion which forced such horror into her own face and voice. "Have you any friends, anywhere?"

"Only in Edinburgh," Jenny replied hopelessly. "I 'ave an aunt there wot would 'elp me over Christmas if I could afford to——" She broke off, swaying forward and nearly dropping the child. Barbara took him from her.

"Jenny," she asked, "have you had any food lately?"

"I ain't 'ad—none to-day—miss," came the whisper.

With all Alan's suddenness of purpose, Barbara rose, supporting the girl with one arm and the baby boy with the other.

"Come with me," she said.

Mrs. Stockley, making out a list of necessities for a systematically organized parish tea, presently listened aghast to her daughter's impetuous explanation and extraordinary request.

"That girl! Jenny Grant! To stay in my house? My dear Barbara, I won't hear of such a thing! Whatever would people say? A wicked little—where is she now?"

"Martha is giving her food. She was starving."

Her mother gasped. She rose uncertainly, as if on the point of frustrating this disposal of her goods; then

something in the girl's expression caused her to resume her seat.

"Oh, well! She can have some food. But then she is to go, Barbara——"

"Where?"

Mrs. Stockley fidgeted with her writing-paper.

"That's no concern of mine. Her mother must look after her—a most objectionable chapel woman! Your aunt will be back to-night. She will do something——"

Barbara waved this idea to a place unmentionable. "Will you lend her the money to reach Edinburgh? I haven't got enough loose cash——"

"Certainly not! I might never see it again."

The girl abruptly left the room at this point, with another impulsive resolution.

Half an hour later, after extricating her charges from Martha's distinctly grim ministrations, she rang the bell at the "House on the Moor," and deposited them in the friendly arms of the housekeeper of that harbor where all were welcome. "Mrs. Field won't mind," she said. "I shall be back soon." She hurried away across the dark paths; then turned along the road leading to the vicarage.

"Surely the vicar will help," she muttered to herself. "If only I had the money handy myself——" Down the road skirting the wall which bordered Mrs. Brent-Hewson's model piggery, a bicycle-lamp came flashing. A dark form flew past the girl; then, with a scraping of brakes and rattle of springs, jumped off and hurried back.

"Ah! Miss Stockley! I have wanted to see you." . . . The thrills of the last weeks, and the soul-rending conflict over Major Randall's funeral, had prevented the vicar's

"little talk" with this erring sheep. His voice sounded unusually subdued. The division concerning himself was causing him real trouble. But his duty had been plain and no army could shake it. It must be confessed that his sister felt the brunt; for the anti-Horne faction seemed shy of openly showing their feelings to him; whereas they dropped her. Mrs. Brent-Hewson, for example, wished him a frigid "How d'you do?", but cut Miss Horne dead when they met. . . . Logic was perhaps not Darbury's strongest point!

"I was just coming to see you, Mr. Horne," Barbara replied.

"Really? Ah! I am very glad of that. I hoped you would."

"Why?" she inquired, in genuine surprise.

"Because—well, to be candid, I have felt much troubled about you."

"Indeed?" she said, as he paused. He wheeled his bicycle nearer, and spoke somewhat hesitatingly. There was that about Barbara, nowadays, which seemed to check his bland platitudes. Moreover, his sister had not failed to keep him primed with the varying stages of this slowly unfolding mystery.

"I have been genuinely pained," he continued in his pedantic manner, "at your continued refusal to take up your old work in the parish, and your absence from church. Both have been a real grief to me, as they have to your mother. I am overjoyed, therefore, if, at last——"

"No!" she interrupted. "You are mistaken. I—can't do—either."

He gave a deep sigh. "But—my dear Miss Stockley—when one's duty lies plain——"

"Mr. Horne!" she interrupted again, a note of suppressed passion in her voice, "if you met a blind man, would you send him as guide to a party of tourists?"

"Er—no," he said, bewildered.

She laid her hand on his bicycle, and the passion rose in her hurried words.

"Suppose your whole life—your thoughts, your motives, tastes, ideals, faith—had been taken and changed; then whirled around and dashed to the ground, so that—so that you were broken, crushed, blind—groping in the dark—could you teach children their creed? or train young girls to be 'guides'? or—or kneel in church and worship a God whom—if He exists at all—you hate?—yes, hate!"

"Miss Stockley——!"

"Oh, yes! I know you are horrified. But it's the truth. He throws people into the world, then plays with them—mocks, laughs——"

"Miss Stockley!" The vicar literally shouted her into silence. "I can't—and won't—listen to such wicked words! You are beside yourself! Do, pray, think of what you are saying——"

"I am always thinking of it! . . . Now! Do you understand at last the impossibility of my taking up my 'old work'? Don't you see that I can not?"

"I see," he replied gravely, "that you are in deep trouble and taking it very wrongly. Troubles are sent to test us, you know—to teach us submission. I have a beautiful little book I will lend you upon the subject—most helpful——"

"I know all about that," she interrupted impatiently. "Haven't I listened to such preaching in this church since I was born?"

Poor Mr. Horne was rendered speechless.

From the future bacon beyond the wall came an odor by no means subtle, ever afterward associated in the girl's mind with this talk. She seized the opportunity of forwarding her original purpose.

"I wanted to see you, to-night, about Jenny Grant."

"Jenny Grant?" he echoed, still dazed.

In a few sentences she acquainted him with the facts. He looked at her, by the light of his bicycle-lamp, in yet more astonishment; then, with an air of profound melancholy, shook his head and sighed again.

"They are chapel people, Miss Stockley. It is not my business to interfere."

"But surely——! Whatever difference does that make? It's only a loan of a few pounds—I will pay you back—"

"You don't understand these matters. If we begin lending money to those who are but suffering the rewards of their sins—if we encourage them to expect——"

Barbara turned away and inhaled a deep breath of pig-sty.

"If only Mrs. Field were here!" she muttered involuntarily.

"Mrs. Field? I saw her at the station——"

"*Saw* her? Then she has come back? . . . Good night, Mr. Horne!"

Before he could open his lips, he found himself alone, the sound of flying footsteps in his ears. Still feeling distinctly dazed, he took off his pince-nez and wiped the glass, before mounting his bicycle. . . . Yes, very wrong! Whatever the trouble, it was being taken in quite the wrong spirit. But one must be broad-minded; one must not give up those in sin and darkness. He would send her that little book. . . .

VI

An anchor at last, in a merciless sea!

Thus did it seem to the girl stumbling hurriedly across the dark common. The windows of the house blazed forth a pathway of welcome, long before its refuge was reached. Then a bright-faced maid opened the door; and that subtle sense of radiant warmth—which is only possessed by a house or person when the Spirit of it is at the helm—stole out and enveloped her. . . . With a long-drawn sigh, she entered the cheerful hall.

Two school-teachers sat laughing and smoking by the fire; from an adjacent room came the sound of a piano-forte. . . . A voice called her name from the landing above. . . .

One swift searching glance at the sharpened white features of the girl hurrying up the stairs, and the woman in the fur traveling-coat caught the extended hands and drew her close into her arms.

"Oh, Bab darling!" came the cry from her heart's depth.

A convulsive clinging of thin arms; no words were needed. . . . Here was, at last, the blessed peace of Understanding. . . .

When the door of her den was closed behind them, the elder woman raised the girl's face and looked long into the sunken eyes, with those deep gray ones which bore such resemblance to another's that Barbara caught her breath. She remembered once thinking his lacked their wonderful tenderness. But she had seen it grow there—intensified. . . . Here, too, was the strong dark hair surmounting the broad brow with bitter-sweet similarity. . . .

"Ah!" she cried, "how I have wanted you!"

Mrs. Field pressed her lips upon the tremulous mouth, then loosed her. During those few minutes she had thought rapidly. Having been run to earth in a railway carriage at Waterloo by Miss Davies, the study of a Darbury newspaper—had one existed—was unnecessary. She was stuffed with information from that lady's Unlimited Publishing Company. It only needed reediting by the pen of her own shrewd insight.

"I want to keep you here for Christmas," she said. "Will you stay? I am leaving again afterward. Miss Davies traveled back with me, so your mother does not need you." She saw the flash of unutterable relief cross the girl's face, and turned to the door. Within a few minutes a letter had been despatched to Mrs. Stockley, instructions given to the housekeeper, their outdoor clothes removed, and they were back in the little sitting-room.

Mrs. Field knelt and poked the fire into a bright blaze, then looked up at the silent figure beside her. Her eyes followed those of the girl toward the writing-table and the photograph upon it. . . . And she understood. She rose to her feet. And all the peculiar magnetism, which drew people of every class and creed to this woman, shone in her face, seemed to vibrate in the hand she held out. As the other caught at it, the sealed chamber of her tortured heart burst open in one agonized cry:

"I love him . . . Oh! I love him so. . . ."

"And—he, Barbara?"

"He—loved me."

"Ah!"

The ejaculation was full of mingled relief and comprehension. Her cousin's absorption in his work, travels, or ambitions, to the exclusion of softer emotions, had often been a matter of both chaff and regret between them.

Much had she wondered concerning those two in their peculiar isolation. But ever, also, she had been aware of those sides of his nature shown to few. . . . What he might mean to a woman who at last awakened his love, she could well guess. . . .

Barbara abruptly held out her left hand.

"This was our wedding-ring," she whispered.

The involuntary start which the other gave was quickly controlled. She met steadily, albeit with some apprehension, the girl's searching look—seeming to probe to her very soul, proving its faith. What means had been adopted by that determined kinsman of hers, used to sweeping aside obstacles, to overcome a lifetime of strict conventionality?

"Yes?" she encouraged. "You—married him? Tell me everything; will you?"

"You understand?" The searching look never relaxed. "You do understand?"

The appeal in that passionate regard and question brought quick response.

"Dear," she replied, pulling her down on the couch by the fire, "I understand. You loved each other and acted in accordance with—honorable convictions, in extraordinary circumstances. Is that enough? What more can I say?"

Barbara drew a breath of inexpressible relief. Holding fast to that sympathetic hand, she recounted with simple fervor the whole history. Everything was so fresh still in her memory that the unconscious vividness of her recital carried her listener away. In the leaping flames before them, Margaret Field seemed to see the little hut on the desolate shore; the horror of the first days was hers, the gradual enthralment of the free life; she joined

the feast at the natives' settlement, seeing the figures squatting around and—later—the lurid torches and wild dancing, while the flames leaped and curled about the sacrifice; she saw the sun rise slowly across the sea, its rays shining upon two lonely figures uttering their marriage vows. . . . And ever, behind all, she felt the vitality and charm of the man's personality, as he swept the girl along through all vicissitudes and fears; she realized the force of that love, once roused. . . .

Nothing was omitted up to the present. When her voice ceased, there fell a long silence. From somewhere in the house came a merry laugh; an opening door let out a brief flood of dance music. . . . Then a piece of coal dropped into the fender, and Mrs. Field moved.

"Oh, Bab!" she cried, from her heart, "how you must have suffered!" As if incapable of speech, she rose and walked to the writing-table. For some moments she looked upon the pictured face there . . . then returned to the fireplace; where she laid her arms on the mantelpiece, and bowed her head upon them. . . . Presently she looked up, unashamed of the tears still wet upon her cheeks.

"Alan—was very dear to me," she said brokenly. "He was always like a younger brother. So full of life! I—I can't realize——" She broke off.

This genuine participation in her grief was more precious to Barbara than any torrent of consoling words. "Not many would understand," she said. "You believe—we did right?"

"You were both people with strong principles. You acted conscientiously up to them, as they appeared to you in such a position. Therefore, how could you be doing wrong? It's the motive of the heart that counts.

Some others would have done the same; but—in them—it would have been wrong. . . . Bab," she asked presently, her quick sympathy seeing all round the question, "did poor, dear Hugh understand?"

She shook her head miserably. "I'm afraid not. He was bewildered and—oh! I couldn't bear making him suffer! His face haunts me."

"He will get over it in time, dear—he did before, when you were lost. His sport and animals mean so much to him. He would make a model husband if his wife didn't expect too much. But you, Bab—I used to fear for you! I wanted you to go away and see——" She mused silently a while. "To marry without real love is simply filing a future petition for divorce, nowadays," she remarked.

Barbara looked up quickly. "It isn't true—about Tony, I mean——?" she suggested diffidently.

More upset than she cared to show, Mrs. Field rose to find her cigarettes. "He swears not—and I believe him. But he can't prove it. He says he spent that night with Alan. It was the night before your flight began. Did Alan ever speak about it?"

Barbara took a cigarette, and shook her head. "Never."

"Alan's landlady in Kensington is dead . . . it will be very difficult. Tony offended Mrs. Scott then, by abruptly breaking with her, I understand. Now she is trying to get her own freedom and revenge herself on him at the same time. Tony became such a fool over pretty women during the war! I was so relieved when he settled down with Sybil—they suited each other well. But," she sighed, striking a match, "I fear she's going to prove a broken reed."

"Won't she stand by him?"

"At present she refuses to see him. He is stationed in Ireland just now, and coming on leave after Christmas. My flat will be ready then—I am going up. Ah, Bab! it's a mixed-up old world; isn't it?" She made a brave attempt at her usual brightness.

Barbara threw out her arms wearily.

"It's all wrong!" she declared. "Alan called it a harmony; but it's not—it's lost, swallowed up in discords!"

"Oh?" exclaimed the other, in some surprise. She smiled a little. "Alan was ever a quaint mixture of idealism and action." She looked at the girl's hopeless expression with yearning tenderness. "Don't be too sweeping, my dear. It is broken, perhaps, but not lost. Harmony can still be heard in the most unexpected places at times; which proves that it is there all the time, to be regained when the world desires it. Our own little personal bit is the merest fragment, you know. . . . It's always a temptation to lose faith in the whole when we lose our bit—to become hard and cynical, or scoff—but don't, Bab, dear! It's—little; and cheap!"

"But the keynote is lost," protested the girl. "The heathen with their ignorance and the Christians with their knowledge use only—substitutes. And," she cried in bitterness of soul, "I have lost mine, too! What is life without love?"

"But you haven't lost that!" exclaimed the other quickly. "If you had—should I have found two homeless creatures waiting in my kitchen to-night?" She threw away her cigarette and took the girl's wan face in her hands. "Bab, the world is starving for food in many places, and starving for love—everywhere! It has, I grant, become cold—seeking false gods, jeering at sentiment, turning into organized systems what should be

loving labor. It is full of misunderstanding, greed and ill-feeling, which result in wars, internal strife and increasing domestic troubles. So—don't shut away the love you have learned you possess: Give it! Give it all!" She passed her hand through the short wavy hair. . . . "That's perhaps what it's given to some of us for—just to pass on," she added, half to herself.

As the girl raised her eyes, she read in them all the killed hopes of her heart—the awakened yearnings of wifehood stifled, the dormant fires of motherhood vanished into smoke, the black chasm of loss. . . . The poignant suffering in their depths found its echo in the elder woman's breast.

"Ah, my darling!" she cried. "It is bitter . . . I know . . . I know." . . .

That was the first of many talks together during that Christmas season, which brought with it such acute memories. . . .

Jenny Grant was disposed of, with her hostess's usual airy quickness of decision, between two puffs at a cigarette. "She can cook. I want her for the flat. The child can come, too."

Barbara's own future likewise received attention. The impossibility of remaining long in Darbury among its little parochial occupations was obvious to this woman with her wide vision.

"All work is important," she said weightily. "That sounds horribly 'Horney'; doesn't it? But it would be absurd to make a deep-sea diver pick weeds from a garden path! You have been among what you and Alan picturesquely term 'deep chords.' Therefore you will be invaluable for deep-sea diving, not weeding! You shall come with me later on, Bab." . . .

But Barbara's soul was at present wandering in outer darkness. She was not yet fit to plunge to the bottom of the ocean's mysteries; and Mrs. Field knew that.

"Everything appears to me so distorted!" she cried once. "When I read the papers, and hear of all the horrors which have happened since the war, it seems as if the world had lost its head and its heart. Under the surface, civilized beings are proving themselves no better than the savages. There seems no level-headed medium. They are either intolerant in their narrowness, or at the other extreme, where their outlook is—putrid! It—it was awful on the boat." She clenched her hands, and Mrs. Field looked up quickly.

"What happened there?"

"Everybody discovered who I was. They watched me, and whispered. . . . Most of them took for granted —Oh! you know what I mean? Men smiled and sometimes spoke to me—familiarly. . . . Some of the women shunned me; others insinuated. . . . One or two prided themselves upon being 'advanced.' I hated them! They read loathsome books, and talked horrible stuff about every woman bearing children and prostitution being legalized. . . . Honor was laughed at; marriage termed old-fashioned; men all classed together as sort of animals. It was monstrous! I left the boat at Marseilles; but—I knew what to expect."

Mrs. Field gazed into the fire, with puckered brow.

"You have experienced the two extremes, poor Bab!— Those who condemn, and those who condone, all things. Each is harmful, in its way; but few know where the right dividing-line should come."

"It's monstrous!" the girl cried again. "Women are not such—cows; nor men such brutes. I have proved

that. Such people would drag civilization down below the level of—Babooma. And they condemn Alan and me to that plane!"

"It's perhaps a natural instinct, in these early days of emancipation, for our own sex to fly to extremes," mused the elder woman. "Like children who are not allowed sweets: when they get alone in a tuck-shop, they make themselves sick! . . . They are to be pitied for unbalanced minds. It's freedom of mind that really matters. Those who have always possessed that—however remote or cramped their lives—have not lost their heads since the war opened up external freedom to them. They may be bewildered and a little uncertain, for a time; but they can look around and sift the true from the false. The others only have imaginary freedom. They shackle themselves afresh with any new craze, especially those which give the greatest scope for lower tendencies hitherto kept too strictly in check! Therefore, you get the modern tendency to make excuses for every weakness: the lowest is to be pandered to, instead of proving a strength and being thus merged into the highest. . . . Bab, please stop me. I'm not fond of sermons!"

Barbara smiled. "You do me good. I haven't anybody to talk to—now."

Mrs. Field caught her close and kissed her. . . .

On the afternoon of Boxing Day, as the girl sat alone, Hugh suddenly appeared—a grave-faced Hugh, with the bewildered "doggy" look still in his eye. She rose to meet him, with some embarrassment.

"Mrs. Field's with the old people. She said you were alone," he blundered, in explanation. "Bab—I've missed you, old thing!"

This simple directness touched her. She, too, had been

conscious of a gap in the surface of her life, among the old haunts of their childhood, which had added to her wretchedness. Impulsively, she gave him her other hand.

"I have missed you, too, Hughie!"

Hugh clearly had something on his mind.

"I wanted to say," he blundered on, "—to tell you—I was a rotter—that day! I've been thinking the deuce of a lot lately, Bab! And I wanted you just to know—you can count on me any time to—back you and Croft up, I mean." . . .

It was clumsily expressed; but she understood what the effort cost him, and the genuine feeling behind it all.

"I dare say," he continued hurriedly, "that I don't altogether understand the—position out there, even yet. But I—I'll swear by you both——"

"Hughie!" Not daring to trust her voice further, she pressed his hands, conscious of a surprising sense of relief. All her life, Hugh's opinion had meant much: she had missed it sorely.

Each seemed to find speech difficult.

"I don't see," he began at last, "why our old—friendship shouldn't continue, just the same, Bab?"

"Ah!" she cried chokingly, "it is dear of you. I need friends—heaven knows!"

Hugh looked at her diffidently, then away through the window, speaking quickly and huskily. "And I wanted you to know that it—later on, perhaps—you felt you could marry me, after all——" he paused, glancing at her, "I shall always be there—just the same."

The eyes that met his were swimming in sudden tears. "My dear!" she cried. "But it can never be now—"

"You need not say anything, or bother about it," he said simply.

Impulsively she pressed his hands against her cheek; then he drew himself free. Hugh intensely disliked scenes. Having said what he wanted, he turned the subject. "Mrs. Field told me to have tea with you. She said there were loads of muffins! Let's sit on the hearth-rug and toast them, as we used to do."

So they sat together on the floor toasting muffins, the barrier breaking down between them. Hugh recounted his doings of the past years; and she found herself able to tell him fragments of her own experiences—the birds discovered upon the island, the strange fish and uncanny things seen in the sea, the natives' "crows' nests." . . . And, in the flickering twilight, the face of the man in the photograph looked down upon them, as if understanding this wraith of an old friendship hovering about the room. . . .

Thus Mrs. Field found them on her return; and a certain look of relief crossed her face. . . .

The days following Christmas were, therefore, a little less unbearable: the girl's intolerable loneliness had been lifted. Hugh speedily drifted into his old habit of relying upon her companionship. His wish for their renewed friendship had been pathetically sincere. As of yore, he fetched her to tramp the fields with his dogs and gun. She was persuaded to unearth her habit and ride with him again, on the mounts he provided; to spend hours upon the links. . . . And she did it all more from a sense of pleasing him than anything else.

Mrs. Stockley watched this renewed intercourse with secret satisfaction; but the consumption of tea in Darbury again increased rapidly. Words let fall from the vicar's overcharged mind to his sister spread like a swiftly-growing heath fire. . . . Something awful must have

happened on the island, for Barbara Stockley encouraged immorality and was an atheist! Suspicion was now red-hot. She was shunned, or looked at askance. . . . And yet here she was, with calm audacity "carrying on" with Hugh again, giving no other girls a chance. . . . What next was Darbury to hear? Feeling quite faint, it turned, naturally, to Miss Davies for smelling-salts. She did not fail it.

She held long insinuating conversations with her sister, who was reduced to tears over lurid accounts of the talk now in progress. The contemplation of an atheistic daughter proved far less harrowing. But why should Barbara be an atheist? If all people with unrequited passions became atheists——

"Rubbish!" Miss Davies snapped. "With my knowledge of men, do you expect me to believe that? Stuff!"

The storm broke unexpectedly.

It was one of those days when everything goes wrong. The village "help" did not come; and Martha therefore considered herself too much overworked to complete any one job. Lunch was late, the soup tepid, the potatoes were hard, coffee was lukewarm. The clogging of the well-oiled wheels of this small groove naturally resulted in "nerves" on the part of its mistress. These, working up gradually, found relief in an explosion, when Barbara announced an afternoon's golf with Hugh. Surely there must be work of some sort for her to do in this tragedy of an un-"help"-ed household? This led to a heated argument, which took a sudden deflection down an unexpected channel.

"Of course, if you have renewed your engagement with Hugh——"

"I have not, mother. I never can."

"Then your behavior is most uncircumspect! And it is causing much talk. To go about as you do with men, unchaperoned——"

"Chaperon? Oh, mother! After—after——"

"You can't live here as you did on a desert island."

"No, indeed!"

Her tone held a passionate depth of feeling which caused her mother and aunt to exchange quick glances.

"And why can you never marry Hugh?" the former asked testily. "Is it still because of that ridiculous infatuation? Barbara, I insist upon your forgetting such nonsense."

"You don't understand, mother. I can never forget."

"No," agreed Mrs. Stockley with some heat; "I do not understand; and I think it is time I did!"

She turned to her sister, as usual, for support, which was speedily forthcoming.

"Barbara," began that worldly woman, her curiosity at last given legitimate rein, "how far did this infatuation go? *What* can you never forget?"

The girl looked at her, startled, at a momentary loss. Her sensitive face, an enemy to subterfuge, flushed angrily.

"Ah!" exclaimed her aunt meaningly, "I thought from the first there was something wrong."

"Wh-what do you mean, Aunt Mary? There was nothing—wrong!"

"Then why maintain such mystery? Why are you afraid to talk of the matter—to tell the truth?"

A rush of loathing, contempt for all the suspicious minds about her, recklessness, which, in impulsive natures, has far-reaching effects, swept the girl away. After all, what did their feelings matter? What their

opinions to the man whose memory she had tried in vain to shield from vulgar calumny? A furious desire to hurl a knife into the Darbury "gas-bags" and see them explode whirled discretion away, like feathers in a rising gale. . . .

She turned and faced the two women, tossing back the hair from her brow.

"You shall have the truth!" she cried, with suddenly blazing eyes. "This 'infatuation' you talk about went —to the end. He returned my love. We became husband and wife."

VII

The silence was awful. A dormant volcano could not have seemed more vibrant with foreboding. The two women sat, bereft of speech, gazing blankly at the girl, who faced them fearlessly from the hearthrug. From Mrs. Stockley's face every vestige of color had fled. She looked suddenly old; her features were haggard.

Then Barbara, as she had done twice before, held out her left hand.

"This," she said, breathing fast, "is my wedding-ring. He was my husband."

The tension broke. Mrs. Stockley gasped, and her sister gave a snort of contemptuous laughter.

"'Husband'!" she mocked. "Pray—who was the priest? Where was the church? Or—had you a native registry office?"

The sarcasm was to the girl merely as the heat of an extra candle to one already enveloped in flames. She ignored the speaker, fixing her eyes upon her mother.

"Do you understand, mother?"

At that moment the sight of her mother's deathly face

struck, like a blow, upon her heart. Her anger subsided as quickly as it had arisen; in its place a huge pity arose, making it suddenly imperative that the woman who had borne her should be saved the suffering of misconstruction.

Impulsively she moved forward, stretching out both hands.

"Mother?"

Mrs. Stockley rose slowly to her feet, ignoring the hands, still staring at her daughter as if she were some hideous snake seen in a corner of her comfortable room.

"You!" she muttered. "You—my daughter—you dare to face me with those—lies?"

The hands dropped and clenched at her sides. "They are not lies! It was impossible to get married according to English law. We therefore performed the ceremony for ourselves. We took the same vows—it was perfectly honorable."

Miss Davies broke in with another harsh laugh.

"Did he actually succeed in stuffing you with all that, to cloak your immorality?"

"Aunt Mary! How dare you——?"

"Oh! it's always the same! Haven't I dealt with hundreds of cases in my Work which have been 'perfectly honorable'? Fools! dupes! You weak women believe anything!"

"You—y-you——" Barbara choked, in her furious indignation.

"Immorality!" Mrs. Stockley caught at the word. "Immorality? In one of our family? My own daughter—?"

"You got off lightly," broke in her sister, watching the girl narrowly, through her lorgnette. "Without paying

the price! Most girls are not so fortunate. But I suppose you took good care to prevent——"

"Yes!" cried her mother almost hysterically, "suppose there had been children?"

"There would have been," she replied with unnatural calm, her eyes burning in an ashen face. "That is why I was so ill at Singapore."

For a moment both women were again bereft of speech. Barbara turned to the fire and stood gazing into its depths.

"Ha!" gasped her aunt, at last. "I always thought there was something suspicious in that illness."

Then the girl flashed round, contempt ringing in her voice.

"Yes, Aunt Mary, you would! People like you would find something suspicious in—an archangel. Oh!" she cried passionately, "I know all the disgusting, vulgar gossip concerning Alan and myself! I knew it before I reached England. Now, I suppose, you will all purr in your self-righteousness, thinking how wise you were—"

"B-Barbara!" spluttered her dumfounded aunt.

"Oh, yes, you will! But"—turning blazing eyes upon Miss Davies' furious face—"you are all wrong! How can *you* tell what was right and what was not—out there? What do you all know of real, fundamental life? What experience have you had of—love, temptation—any problems—that you should dare—*dare* to judge? You all carry out your religious observances to the letter—but what about the spirit of it all?"

The two women were staggered by her furious flow of words.

"Barbara!" blustered her aunt, "y-your impertinence—your——"

The girl turned away, passionately, to her mother.

"Mother! won't you—for your own sake—try to view this from my standpoint? Try to realize our position—to understand——"

"I understand," cried Mrs. Stockley, in weak impotent rage, "that you have disgraced our name! Sin can not be excused. Whatever the man was—and thank heaven he is dead!—*you* should have shown strength. You—you—are nothing but a—wanton!"

"Mother!" The girl recoiled, as if she had been struck, catching at a chair for support.

Her mother broke into a storm of hysterical weeping.

"Go!" she cried, between her sobs. "Leave the house! I—I—refuse to own you! Go to your friends who—condone immorality—who encourage sin. . . . Join Jenny Grant——"

"Mother!" she cried again, with white lips, "you don't realize what you are saying——"

"I do! I do!—Go!" Weakly she stamped her foot, then sank into her chair, burying her face in her handkerchief.

A wild caricature of a laugh broke from Barbara's lips. She looked at her mother's shaking form, then at her aunt's rigid figure and hostile countenance.

"Very well," she said slowly, "I will go." . . . As if dazed, she put up her hand to her head, and gave one look round the familiar room. . . . Presently the drawing-room door closed, with deliberate quietness, behind her.

. . . . . .

"Darling, you mustn't be too bitter." Mrs. Field knelt down in the firelight beside the girl's bed and drew her into her arms. "Remember, she is suffering too, Bab! Your mother belongs to the old order. Life is very diffi-

cult nowadays for them. They can't reconcile the present views, all the splendid new freedom of individuality, with the old narrow orthodoxy."

"But the intolerance, the intolerance!" moaned the girl. "To call *me*—that! Wanton. Do you understand? *Wanton!*"—her voice rising hysterically. She would have struggled free, but the elder woman held her close.

"Ah, Bab, Bab! You must forget that. She did not mean it."

"She did! She did! That's what I am—in the eyes of the world."

"Only in the blind eyes. And those afflicted with blindness are those who cause themselves the worst suffering. You were splendidly true to yourselves—you and Alan. You can always glory in that. When time has softened things a little, that will be your greatest joy."

This reference, bitter-sweet in all it conjured up, nevertheless soothed the girl's lacerated spirit. She clung to her friend in silence a while, her mind back among the days that were for ever past.

In her present state, hurled as she had been from a life surrounded by passionate love into one composed of suspicion, hardness, lack of all attempts at understanding or sympathy, it seemed that her very soul had been shriveled up. Hatred and cruelty, in all their nakedness, had raised the flaming sword which had barred the gates of the "earthly paradise." In subtler, civilized ways, the same force had met her at nearly every turn, since she arrived in England. Intolerance? That seemed to be the keynote everywhere, adding to the unbearable misery of those whose lives were already overburdened.

Barbara's sudden appearance at the flat had brought Mrs. Field little surprise. She had heard the rumblings

of the storm approaching in Darbury, had seen the lowering clouds; but, with rare insight, she forbore to interfere. Some storms, being inevitable, are best left to themselves. "Forewarned and forearmed," one's work comes later with salvage and reconstruction. Not a whole regiment of engineers could pull down the wall encircling Mrs. Stockley's horizon; of that Mrs. Field was certain. In time, when the shock, and—above all—the talk, had subsided, a few bricks might, with infinite tact, be drawn away, allowing an occasional glimpse of wide uplands beyond. . . . But that would not be yet. . . . In the meantime it was the girl's quivering soul which needed infinite delicacy in handling; which wavered, struggled, sank gradually lower into the dark wilderness of morbidity, from which those who get lost therein take long to discover a way out; and, when they do, find the burrs and thorns still sticking to them, never to be quite shaken off.

For to Barbara this drastic action of her mother had been as the knock-out blow to one already weak and bleeding. The difficulty of piercing her limited understanding had always been obvious; but of such intolerance, such cruel, stabbing words, such unusually decisive action, the girl had never dreamed. It left her numbed, bewildered, shaken in body and mind. . . . As she helped Mrs. Field in the flat, the clouds seemed to close in around her. Tony's short leave, with his depression, his miserable interviews with lawyers, and the dreary outlook of the case, accentuated the gloom. An unexpected visit from Hugh, full of indignant sympathy, yet brought the echoes of the explosion ignited by herself in Darbury. . . .

She accompanied her friend into parts of London

hitherto known barely by name: where the sight of hideous suffering—of little children torn and crippled; men and women doomed to lifelong agony or slow, harrowing deaths; of some who, strong and full of vigor in the morning, were brought into the hospitals ere night, bloody, writhing, their moans echoing along the corridors as they were carried from the ambulances—these things turned her sick, filling her with a mental nausea more intolerable than the physical. . . . This was—Harmony?

Mrs. Field had strongly demurred at first. "You are not fit to come yet," she had said. "Wait! You're too sore yourself at present."

But the girl had feverishly insisted, struggling against the thorns of the wilderness closing around her.

"I can't—daren't—remain idle! Let me come. Show me all there is to be seen. Teach me all there is to know. Let me try to find some meaning, or I shall go mad!"

And she saw things which she would only have expected to find among Babooma's following. She learned of things she had never dreamed of, in this jumble of civilization. . . .

And this was—Harmony? One who had known of it all, had yet called it by that name!

The word echoed now, like a mockery, through all she saw and heard. . . . She turned, as so many turn in indignation, and blamed the Creator who allowed such things to be. If this world had been begun in "heavenly harmony," what substitute did the Composer Himself use to tune it to this key of agony? What was this heaven, talked about so glibly? Who, the Creator of such discord? . . . What was God? . . .

She broke down at last, and turned with feverish craving toward the big open spaces. . . .

"I must go away!" she cried. "Right away, by myself. I'm down in—in a black pit—I can't see light anywhere." . . .

Margaret Field had been through all this herself, years ago. No words, she knew, could help. She watched the girl closely, but made no attempt to force her. Putting back the clock of her own days, she entered the black pit with her, understanding her darkness.

"It's all such waste!" the girl cried in her wretchedness. "What might be so beautiful is all turned to hideousness. Wherever there is humanity there is pain and misery——"

"And happiness," put in the other quietly. "On the whole, things are pretty evenly balanced—you will see that later. It takes a lot to compose this cosmology we call Life. Who can hope to unravel the mystery of suffering? There are thousands of poems and platitudes, of course, which can be blandly quoted—some very beautiful. But most souls, if they are worth much, have, some time, to get at grips with it all, themselves, unaided. . . . Go away, Bab, dear, and try . . . or, at any rate, breathe pure air and look at lovely big things until the pit becomes less black. Then come back to me and help to tune a little corner to a happier key. . . . That's all we can do," she added simply.

Barbara went away. She gave no address. "I want to feel cut off from everything and everybody who knows me—for a time," she said, when her friend expostulated.

Mrs. Field knew this feeling. "But what about the De Borceaus? An expedition has gone to search for them——"

She shook her head. "They are dead, too, or we should have heard. Even if they are found, what of it?

If they have—any news, it—will only be harrowing. No! I can't bear anything more just now. . . . Give me a month or six weeks. . . . then I'll write. . . ."

. . . . . .

A remote Cornish village, trailing its whitewashed cottages down a precipitous narrow lane bordered by little cobbled ditches wherein ducks waddled and talked together—winding round a corner between fragrant gardens that merged into gray walls of houses and banks which, in summer, oozed ferns from every crevice, burst forth into fires of purple-red fuchsias and bulged out into great clumps of hydrangeas; pausing for breath, while the lane dropped to the old inn in the valley below, the white and gray cottages straggled along on either side the stream gurgling over its stony bed between rolling coombs in the valley behind, to the harbor which was its goal . . . Such was the retreat in which Barbara found herself. Giant headlands guarded the little haven, as it wound to join the open sea beyond. The immense rollers, knowing no hindrance as they tossed across the Atlantic, boomed impatiently against the gray-black cliffs which here frustrated them, their seething fury turned to sobbing moans of impotence between impassive sentinels.

Brooding sphinx-like over the foaming waters, they seemed mutely to rebuke the girl wandering alone in her darkness of spirit, buffeted by the gales without, rent by those within.

"What do you seek?—Transient, coming from the void, going nobody knews whither—do you dare to wrest from us the secrets of the Ages? Dare to set your puny turbulence against that which is immortal?—That which knows all, guides a myriad worlds?"

Standing in the harbor, she looked up at their towering immobility, looked out at the limitless expanse of sea, drawing a long quivering breath. . . .

The chance memory of a friend's rapture had led her weary footsteps thither—to a small gray house near the river, kept by a bright young woman and her true-hearted husband.

Here, unknown and unnoticed, away from the stings of malicious tongues, the inquisitive world—not even seeing a newspaper—she wrestled with the questions and doubts and miseries of her heart.

All the accumulated littlenesses of Darbury—piled now into one heap of uncharitableness; all the poisonous talk and inferences on board ship; all the outrages in a world supposed to have been purged by the war, to have acquired the true spirit of brotherhood and understanding; all the unconscionable savagery underlying the veneer of civilization—which had struck so forcibly one returning from a desert land, causing her hasty conclusion of its advancement being but little, in essentials, upon the prehistoric state of those she had left—all these things, and much more, together with the ever-present agony of her own loss, she faced now, searching vainly for some guiding thread in what seemed all chaos.

She was no coward. She had not abandoned a life the naked reality of which was so full of horror. No idea of ending her own desolate existence entered her mind, when she leaned above the frowning cliffs. She only knew, as Mrs. Field knew, too, that until she could see sufficient light by which to climb up the ragged sides of her dark pit, she could play no part in tuning a little corner of this discordant jangle.

In moments of satisfaction one may exclaim confi-

dently: "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul!" But, to one tossed at the mercy of circumstance, who had seen others ground under the same cruel heel, the first phrase especially seemed a dreary delusion. Perhaps of some it could be said, especially of those whose own ignorance, or folly, narrowness, or pride brought about their inevitable misery. . . . Her thoughts turned to Mr. Horne with his pathetic zeal, to Tony and Sybil and the breach between them. This was, she supposed, typical of many marriages. Two people, substituting attraction for love—unaware of the magnitude of that much-abused word—lightly fetter themselves with those bonds. And the pretty ribbon mistaken for everlasting cord breaks, when strain is felt. The ribbons used are many and varied—wealth, position, ambition, the craving for novelty: what are they but gossamer threads? of what use when storms threaten, or earthquakes shake the ground? When the dreariness of the Divorce Court is reached, do innocent as well as guilty pause and ask if, at the beginning, they themselves did right in binding those threads around them? If their conscience is clear, God alone can help them among their ruins. But if not, let the innocent pause in their judgment and ask whether, had the storm of temptation come their way instead, their own gossamer ribbons would have withstood it.

Barbara trembled at these thoughts, knowing the precipice upon which she had stood in the past with Hugh. In good faith she would have stepped blindly over the edge, only ribbons in her hand. . . . She had been saved from making, with the cruel ease of which Alan had spoken, that irreparable mistake. But what of those who, in all sincerity, are allowed thus blindly to wreck their lives?

In the old days at home Barbara had heard crowds of platitudes concerning the meaning or benefit of suffering; but none of them had conveyed much to her. She was not able, in the complacent orthodoxy of thought, in the smug little ideas set forth from Darbury's pulpit, to find God. Every soul must make that supreme discovery for itself, and the aids must necessarily vary. Away in a desert, with only love for guide, she had drawn near to Him. Now, in the midst of darkness, she had to find Him again.

To her, of late, the world had resembled some merciless monster, seeking, with its manifold claws and mouths, to clutch and devour. One step away from the usual path, and convention's iron claw would seize the stumbling wayfarer and dash him out, in its pharisaical way. One mistake in the struggle for existence, and the mouth of ruin would close upon its victim. One word of slander, and the red-hot monster Scandal would fly, like a fiery meteor, over the civilized world, leaving a scorching trail behind.

She left the world of man and turned to the world "as God had made it." Having found Him among the sublime in nature, she stretched her groping hands to it again, with the sure instincts of one to whom it has become in very truth a mother. Watching the great waves dashing into spray, and listening to the booming of the surf, old scenes rose vividly before her. And as they grew clearer, the new tangle of pain and bewilderment lessened. Slowly, with the improvement of her health, her nerves grew calmer; and the grand infinity of sea and cliffs insensibly affected her mind. Some natures feel crushed, overpowered by vast heights or limitless space. Others expand under their influence. Barbara

belonged to this last fraternity. Invisible hands seemed to draw out, once more, all the shriveled strings of her heart. With the sea breezes without, other winds stirred again in her soul.

Very gradually the remembrance of her past happiness combined with nature's untamed moods to bring to her a fragment of peace. It was the tired peace of one who realizes human inability to unravel the secrets of a suffering universe; who feels his own smallness amid the towering impregnability of those invisible mountains which surely guard the world.

What had Alan said? "The whole world is composed of little notes and their reverberations."

Reverberations!

Is that why some hearts are given a happiness undreamed of by toiling thousands? Not to be kept merely for a personal possession; but to "reverberate" all around. But that hidden reality must necessarily be reached along a dark path. Only by traveling through a tunnel is one made aware of the light before and after, or cognizant of the darkness.

As she reached out to the old happiness, the wall of hardness crumbled. Over the gulf her Beloved reached back to her, in all his radiant vitality.

She remembered words of his, when the ghostly hand of approaching disaster lay upon each: "If it ceased, it would never be really lost. Each event that happens is one more added to our store of beautiful things." It had seemed an idealistic thought at the time, which she had forgotten. Now, with sudden force, it returned. She realized, with a stab of pathetic joy, that, wherever she went, whatever horrors she penetrated, the glorious past would go with her. Love would still be there: it did not

die! It might seem dead in her own life and in the world round her; but it was not so.

And, having been granted this greatest of keynotes, in a passionate perfection known to few, who was she, ingrate, to shut it up within herself? More words of Alan's came back to her mind, concerning his cousin: "She never lost it; she passed it on to others." . . .

Thus it was his spirit which seemed gradually, with the sea and hills, to soothe her; so that, at last, she wrote to Mrs. Field, asking for news. . . .

It was after a stormy night, two days later, that she walked far along the cliffs, buffeted by wind and often stung by spray. This wild weather, like everything fine in nature, laid a calming hand upon her heart, as she opposed to it her bodily strength. She had tea at a farm; then walked back in the early dusk, lost in thought. What might not Mrs. Field's answer contain? What fresh horrors discovered, or borne, by those two gallant Frenchmen? What news of the world of her own activities? What suggestions now for work and action in the Arena?

Well—the riddle was still unsolved; but she would not shirk. She would gird on her armor, and, with the past to help, take her place by that other who, with smiling eyes yet her own knowledge of bitterness, played her part so well: "As one in suffering all, that suffers nothing."

"If the joy of your own personal love is withdrawn," the other woman had said, one day in London, "the seed is never lost. You may think it is for a time; but, later, it shoots up, nourished by experience, growing into a strong plant which will develop into a flowering tree of many branches." The truth of that, too, was dimly in

her mind as she watched the stars come out above the harbor—in her heart the tired peace of one who, giving up tilting at windmills he can never conquer, lays his hand upon the plow which needs it. If solving the mystery of suffering could never be accomplished; if her own personal keynote to happiness were lost; then content she must be to hold out the hand of fellowship to those companions in bitter waters—to help find it for the world starving for love. . . . Perhaps—who knows?—that *is* the answer to the riddle.

As darkness fell, she turned down the path over the rocks; crossed the little bridge spanning the river; and made her way to the gray house, from which cheerful lights beckoned. . . .

She fumbled with the handle, turned it; opened the door; then stood for a moment, blinking confusedly: for something big and dark had loomed up in the small passage, hiding the hanging lamp. . . .

A great cry burst suddenly from the girl's lips. . . . In the dark she turned ashy white; swayed; clutched vainly at the door-post; and would have fallen, had she not been caught by arms that held her so strongly that they stopped her breath. . . .

Alan stood on the threshold.

VIII

It was only a small sitting-room, with an oil lamp and a crackling fire. But all the worlds and all the heavens were enclosed within its walls to the two who clung together in their rapture.

Wonderingly, almost reverently, the girl passed her hands over the arms that clasped her—touching the dark hair and bronzed cheek half-fearfully, scarcely believing

in their reality, looking upon him with bewildered, darkened eyes almost afraid to trust their own sight. The tall broad-shouldered figure had lost not an inch of its uprightness, nor had the head lost its old dominant poise. The few extra lines round the smiling lips and glowing eyes were swept up into the radiance which seemed to envelop him. Yet, in the dark clothes of civilization, he appeared subtly strange to the half-clad, barefooted overlord of savages of other days.

"Yes," he said at last, catching the hand lightly wandering over his arm. "It's all real. Solid flesh—no ghost!"

He raised her chin in the old possessive way, and looked long into the thin face and dark-ringed eyes, which told their own tale of suffering endured; then he pressed her head to his breast and held her close again in silence, as if defying any fate to separate them now. . . .

"But," she stammered faintly at last, "how is it—why—I don't understand——?"

"Why I'm not sleeping with my fathers, as you all surmised? Well—that is your fault."

"Mine?"

He nodded. "When Babooma was about to send me to my gods, you conveniently sent him, instead, to the shades of Valhalla—that last bullet, you know!"

Her eyes opened wide, and she caught her breath.

"I—*killed* him? I—killed Babooma—a man——?"

Swiftly he closed her lips with his own, with quick perception of the effects which renewed civilization might have had upon the primitive instincts aroused on the island.

"I owe my very life to you, wife of my heart," he whispered.

But his reflections were misplaced.

"Thank God!" she cried unexpectedly. "I would still kill anybody—any day—who attempted to hurt you."

"*'Nom de Dieu!'*" he echoed the Frenchmen. "Our life will be a checkered career."

Then Barbara fully recognized once more the old Alan of flesh and blood, deep moods and light banter, poetic idealism and prompt action—deliciously human, warm with love and life. She suddenly laughed, the bewildered sense of shock falling from her—the first real spontaneous laugh of many weeks.

"Alan! Alan! Nothing matters but the fact that you are here—alive! But I can't understand it all. How was such a mistake made?"

"Very easily. Because De Borceau didn't, of course, know friend from foe! Things were going all right with us. But when one of the devils set fire to the hut, and the friendly spear knocked me out, De Borceau naturally thought all was up. Some of Babooma's lot tried to reach you; but Roowa frustrated them. Then De Borceau was staunch to his oath. He fought *anybody* who came near you, like a medieval knight, and carried you off to safety. Poor Roowa thought he had stolen you from me, and nearly went mad!" He laughed reminiscently.

"But you? what happened to *you?* The expedition searched the island. And what became of the De Borceaus when they returned——?"

He sank into the big armchair, still clasping her in his arms. "It's quite a fairy story. You remember the wood in the east—where, that first Christmas Day——?"

"Every leaf!" she breathed.

He smiled into her eyes. . . .

"But not every moss-covered rock. In that wood was a very cleverly concealed entrance to a subterranean passage leading to a kind of vault. This narrowed down into another small outlet—quite impassable—on the shore, which allowed a little fresh air and glimmers of light. This cave was *tabu*. In happier days, when the tribe was sufficiently self-supporting to—provide its own meat, the condemned dinner was—well, we need not go into details! But that cave was supposed to be haunted with the spirits of past feasts. Nobody liked to speak of it, or go near it. When I was considered dead, our friends, very naturally, carried off my bleeding corpse——"

"Oh, don't!" cried the girl who had suffered so much from this well-meaning act. She buried her face on his shoulder. . . .

After a lucid interval, he resumed his narrative.

"When they realized you had been 'stolen' and I was still alive, the fear arose that the 'bird of ill omen' would return and make off with me, too! So, to insure my safety—that was the irony of it all—they raised the *tabu* and hid me in the cave. Only Roowa was courageous enough to enter with food. I was knocked out for some time. When I recovered—Barbara! can you possibly imagine my feelings upon discovering that the rescue party had come and gone? I was raving mad! The poor beggars had done it for the best and were bewildered. Nothing would convince them that the white men were my friends. I spent what seemed years of agony, doubtful if any further help would come. My only hope lay in you."

"In me?"

"I thought you would persuade De Borceau or somebody to try again, not rest content——"

"I wanted to come myself," she cried. "I implored and threatened and— Oh! everybody was so pig-headed! But what happened to De Borceau?"

"As soon as the 'plane's arrival was known, the whole tribe raced pell-mell to the shore and burnt it to cinders. I found the brothers hiding for their life in the forest." He gave an irrepressible bubble of laughter. "They—literally—fell from the trees upon my neck! We have been kissing each other's hands or faces ever since. So, again, nothing remained but to wait and hope. I thought at least a missionary party would turn up. That second expedition was infernally slow!"

He laid his cheek impulsively down upon hers. "But De Borceau could give me news of you. He told me everything—about Singapore——"

Her lips turned, trembling a little, to his.

"And," she whispered, "'It'?"

"And 'It.'" His arms tightened. "And—other things. I insisted. He acted loyally—for us both, Barbara. But—by heaven!—it made my gorge rise to know what you were facing—the inferences, the—— And there I was, powerless as a stranded infant to help you."

"It was—hell!" she murmured briefly. "Have you heard——?"

"Madge told me everything. She got the news of our rescue almost directly after you left London! I came home like the very devil—by sea, air, and land—to find you had disappeared—gone to break your little heart alone, where I couldn't find you——"

"I had to come away, Alan. I was in a turmoil——"

"My Barbara, don't I understand!"

Suddenly his eyes blazed in their old way; and he

dashed an arm down upon the table, causing the flame of the lamp to jump.

"Those blighted Pharisees! Those damned, gossiping——"

"Oh, my dear!" She laughed again at this familiar vehemence.

"I went to Darbury," he explained briefly.

Her laughter fled. "You went to Darbury, Alan?" She glanced apprehensively into his grim face. "What—what happened?"

He remained silent for a moment; then met her eyes with a smile.

"Well . . . No deaths occurred."

"Did—did mother—say——?"

"There was a very free, candid interchange of opinion! I honestly tried to reconcile your mother; but"—— he gave one of his old careless shrugs—"she considers herself disgraced, and talks darkly of being obliged to leave Darbury. . . . I saw Rochdale, too——"

Barbara raised her head again. "Ah! dear old Hugh! He has been—splendid, Alan. His friendship—his struggle to—to—believe——" Her voice quavered.

"I know. And he, of everybody concerned, might with justness have condemned——"

They fell silent a while, each knowing, by their own joy, what it all meant to the friend who had lost. . . . Then other remembrances returned of the world outside these four walls.

"Tony?" she asked, of a sudden. "What is happening——?"

"Oh, that's all right," he replied airily. "I went to Ireland to settle Scott—he won't lift his voice again in a hurry—and brought Tony home for a few days' leave."

A realization of what this return would mean to Mrs. Field combined with her own overwhelming joy to draw from the very depths of her heart a voiceless prayer of thanksgiving. In the luminous, darkened eyes that met her own, she saw the same look of almost reverent awe. Never had he seemed so gloriously alive, so radiant in spirit. Again she raised her hands to feel the features she had never thought to see again; then drew the dear head, with passionate tenderness, down to her breast, and clasped it there. . . .

To both of them, beneath the superficial lightness of talk, this hour equaled in sacredness that of their marriage morning in the dawn. But this held in it, also, the half-fearful joy of a resurrection. The past darkness, with the struggle toward the light, had left ineffaceable marks upon each soul. . . .

"Can't we go back to the island?" she whispered at last.

"Some day." He raised his head and smiled. "We'll retire there, now and then, and live it all again! But our first jaunt is to Australia. I've been commissioned to rebuild the old 'bus. There's been an awful lot of interviewing and publicity since I got back ten days ago——"

"Only ten days! And you've been to Ireland, to Darbury——"

"That's not all."

He looked at her with eyes which held something of their old inscrutability.

"Your relations showed unflattering surprise at what they termed my 'constancy' now we are rescued. Oh, lord!"

"They would!" she cried, with indignation.

"The fear that we meant brazenly to defy the English law possessed them. They besought me to marry you 'properly, in a church.' Your aunt particularly insisted upon a Protestant church—not a registry office, or chapel."

"Just like Aunt Mary!" She laughed rather bitterly. "I couldn't feel—more married," she added, with the quick shy look he loved.

His gray eyes darkened; with a little catch of the breath his arms tightened.

"There's one thing, therefore, which bold bad barons must have in their pockets, when they chase their victims to Darbury, to prove their good intent."

"What is that?"

"A special licence. I know a parson near here. We haven't met for eight years; but I wired this morning, to tell him we should arrive at his church to be married to-morrow——"

"My dear whirlwind!" she gasped.

He bent, with his old violent suddenness, and caught her up so close she could scarcely breathe. All the old passionate, dominating love, which had so often swept her away, poured forth and surrounded her; so that, panting and glorying, her individuality, after all its lonely travail, once more transfused, transformed, into his own.

"So," he whispered, "we must have another wedding, my Beloved! But it can not be more beautiful—more real—than the other in the dawn——"

With a little sobbing, tremulous sigh, she clung close. . . . . "If we had one every year, in every land and every tongue," she murmured whimsically, "they would all seem beautiful to me."

The landlady discreetly entered at last to lay the supper. She cast one comprehensive glance at the armchair, and her smiling face grew more radiant.

"We are to be married in the morning," Alan remarked.

Cornish people take life calmly. They do not lose their heads or forget their duties in any crisis.

"Yes, sir!" Mrs. Tregutheran agreed brightly. "I'm sure I du hope you will both be happy. And—will you have eggs tu breakfast, sir—or bacon?"

"Both—heaps!"

They smiled at each other when she left the room.

"Somebody must feed us," he observed, passing his fingers through her curly hair. "Every little note has its niche."

. . . . . .

Hugh sat long over a lonely breakfast, a few days later. The "old people" were away. The London paper, with its list of marriages, lay upon the table before him; but he stared away absently, through the window, without turning the page. . . .

Presently, with gun and dogs, he stepped out into the raw February air, turning aimlessly down a line. . . . An hour later, followed closely by six puzzled brown eyes, he walked slowly up the pathway in the little wood where—æons ago—he and Barbara had discussed their honeymoon. The gun still rested unused within his arm, the cartridges untouched within their bag. . . .

Underfoot, the fir-needles lay soft and damp with here and there fronds of sodden dead bracken drooping upon them. The tall pines swayed a little, whispering their everlasting, murmurous song; dropping, sometimes, splashes from their wet leaves, like tears, upon the dreariness below. All the world appeared gloomy, dead, sor-

rowful. It seemed impossible that, soon, the sap would run in the tall trees, the young green shoot forth upon the hedges, spring—with its fresh myriad life—awake with the "singing of birds." . . .

The unloaded gun dropped unheeded to the ground. . . . The six brown eyes questioned one another wonderingly; then looked back at the tweed-clad figure lying face downward, with head buried in his arms. . . .

At last Shag, ever the most tender-hearted of friends, approached cautiously; sniffed; then gently licked what was visible of a much-loved cheek.

THE END

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